Speaking with Ghosts that Rob Graves:
Traces of Neurasthenia in Robert Graves War Poetry Through a Veteran's Perspective

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ABSTRACT

My purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the ongoing scholarly discussion of Robert Graves and how the effects of neurasthenia can be found within his war poetry. Following Dr. Carl Leggo's methods and suggestions, I will use the process of deconstruction by utilizing my research sources combined with my own experiences to provide a new, veteran's perspective. Considering the long career that Robert Graves was able to enjoy before his death, one may even be able to argue that it was the conditions and experiences from his time in the military which set Graves apart and allowed him to maintain relevance until his passing

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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To my parents, Sandra and Ronald T. Phinazee—thank you for giving me so many opportunities in my youth, for both setting high moral and ethical standards and showing me that hard work and dedication always present results, and most importantly for understanding and supporting me when I decided to branch out and follow my own path in life, no matter the distance and even through difficult times. I hope I have surpassed every hope and expectation you had for my life and that I continue to do so. Mom, I am so happy that you have been a part of this chapter in my life and my academic journey. And even though Dad is no longer physically here with us, I'm sure he knows.

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Lastly, to my beautiful, loving wife, Brandi. The long hours, emotional sways, missed events, and overall stresses have finally paid off. Thank you for standing by me through this entire process and never wavering in your love and support. Without you, I doubt that I would have been able to persevere alone. You will always be my better half…
I love you more.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

During my time stationed at R.A.F Mildenhall in the United Kingdom, I found myself visiting the nearby metropolis of London every chance I could. I loved to lose myself in the massiveness of the city, a central hive of people each going about their own lives and business moving about through transhistorical streets with contemporary glass skyscrapers such as the cylindrical Gherkin and the egg-shaped London City Hall existing within only a short distance of famous historical locations such as Hyde Park, Whitechapel (where Jack the Ripper is still a source of income from tourists), and the ever-impressive and awe-inspiring Westminster Abbey. In London, the past seamlessly joins the present, the ages blending into a carefully painted canvas of engineering art. I tried to see everything within London during my two years stationed in England, although I am sure I either missed so much or at least did not recognize the importance of some of the sights I had the privilege of seeing.

Of all the tourist locations I visited, I remember Westminster Abbey fondly. With multiple carefully carved statues, large artistic windows, immensely tall columns and walls, Gothic architectural designs, Parliament and Big Ben, and millions of hidden details, it is easy to become entranced by the massive engineering marvel that is Westminster Abbey. The location became a staple of my every visit, becoming a location I must see even if only for a few minutes before moving on with my holiday. During one of my visits, I found an area commonly referred to as the Poets' Corner, where statues,

busts, stained glass windows, and other memorials of past poetic greats of England are displayed on walls and columns. If you look down, you will also find many engraved memorial slates within the floor listing off names and dates of such greats as Alfred Lord Tennyson, D.H. Lawrence, Lord Byron, Lewis Carol, and others. Among these memorial slates on the floor, I only remember one that represented multiple poets. The inscription around the list of sixteen names reads: "My Subject is War, and the Pity of War, The Poetry is on the pity, 1914+1918" and then lists the following names:

> Richard Aldington, Laurence Binyon, Edmund Blunden, Rupert Brooke, Wilfrid Gibson, Robert Graves, Julian Grenfell, Ivor Gurney, David Jones, Robert Nichols, Wilfred Owen, Herbert Read, Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, Charles Sorley, [and] Edward Thomas. (*The First World War Poetry Digital Archive, University of Oxford*)

As an amateur poet who had decided to follow the traditions inspired by my grandfathers, I found myself in the Poets' Corner on many occasions, looking at the names and likenesses of authors I had either read before or others I was unfamiliar with. My father's father, William Jewell 'Shortie' Phinazee, had been an aircraft mechanic in the Army Air Corp and the United States Air Force after the branch became its own entity on 18 September 1947, during World War II in the Pacific Theatre. My mother's father had been a Military Police officer (MP) with the United States Army during the war in the European Theatre. I had followed their steps by enlisting, and, like my father's father, I often wrote poetry to express my emotions and sort through my thoughts.

Standing amongst the memorials of so many famous poets, I don't know if I sought to mysteriously absorb some unobtained talents, find some new inspiration, or

simply enjoy the fact that there was a place of prominence and prestige for other writers. After my first deployment to the Operation Enduring Freedom Theatre in 2005, I found myself drawn to the war poets memorial more than before. Possibly it was because I felt that these sixteen men may have a better understanding of the person I had become, or maybe I was just beginning to understand them. After my deployment to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006 performing convoy duty, this list of names had become the only ones I seemed to concern myself with in the grand hall. While I had read a few selections of their poems individually, it wasn't until over a decade later that I would begin to revisit those authors to try to understand their writings on a deeper, and maybe even a more personal, level.

On 11 November 1985, the Memorial to First World War Poets was ceremoniously unveiled at Westminster Abbey (*University of Oxford*). Of the sixteen poets listed on the slate, only one poet was still alive to be in attendance—Robert Graves, who at the time was ninety years old. He passed away shortly after the ceremony on 7 December 1985, only twenty-six days later. Being that I was born 9 June 1985, this means that Mr. Graves was also the only British Great War poet that was alive at any point during my own lifetime.

It was for this simplistic, unimpressive reason that I chose to begin my research and study Robert Graves, his life, his military service, and his poetry.

Robert Graves was a man with whom I felt I may find some personal understanding and commonalities with when I was trying to decide on my thesis topic. He was an accomplished prose stylist, essayist, critic, and acclaimed scholar. Despite his sometimes unconventional or socially awkward mannerisms and often controversial

theoretical and critical publications, Robert Graves continues to be regarded as an influential and highly respected force within the literary field. To me though, his most intriguing accomplishments were that he had been both a soldier in World War I and an accomplished poet that was able to continually produce and publish his numerous works despite suffering from shell shock.

Douglas Day, in his introduction for *Swifter than Reason*, argues that, "there has never been a full-length study of the poetry and criticism of Robert Graves, and, whatever Graves may say about the reader over his shoulder, there needs to be one" (xii). Even Robert Graves seems to agree with this notion, writing in his essay "Pulling a Poem Apart" that "no poet, however much of a classic, is above criticism" (*On Poetry* 274). But Graves had not made such a bold comment off-handedly as some passive idea; he was a man that actively practiced his beliefs for a greater part of his life. The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* credits Laura Riding and Robert Graves and their 1928 jointly-published *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* as the earliest printed introduction and beginning of "Explication" for English poetry, which is explained as "formal, structural, or textual analysis [that] examines poetry or any such work of literature for a knowledge of each part and for the relation of these parts to the whole" (265). For decades, theorists and critics have critiqued and reviewed the war poems of Robert Graves and published their insights and opinions. While I am somewhat inclined to agree with many of the assessments, I also think that may I have a unique perspective that the prior experts lack. Though I have never spent time in the trenches, like Robert Graves, I am also a veteran of war, having served in both Operation Enduring Freedom in 2005 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2006. Also, like Graves, I am still living with conditions

which are the direct result from those wars. I will use my own personal experiences, combined with informed research, to deconstruct and analyze selections of the war poems produced by Robert Graves. My thesis will fill the gaps or at least expand the context for the poems that are otherwise unable to be filled by civilians within the ongoing literary conversations. I will be focusing primarily on finding the effects or signs of neurasthenia within the poetry.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There has been quite a bit of critical literature on Robert Graves, his life and his works. However, Graves has written many of these himself, including his autobiography *Goodbye to All That* which he wrote at the age of thirty-three, giving a rather unapologetic account of his life up until that time. Martin Seymour-Smith describes *Goodbye to All That* as "one of the best autobiographical books written about the period of the First World War" (*Writers & Their Work* 6). The autobiography was originally published in England in 1929, republished in the United States of America in 1930, and then Graves published a revised edition internationally in 1957. The 1957 edition differs greatly in sections, with some names and titles changed, some areas heavily rewritten or reorganized, and also with multiple omissions and additions throughout, demonstrating instances of maturity in the writing of Graves late in life but also losing some of the text's youthful passion found in the original print. As Nedra Drake describes the autobiography in her 1970 thesis paper, it is "a book primarily about war. All but the first few and the last few chapters concern Graves's war experience and his post-war struggle to overcome neurasthenia" (19). However simple Drake may present the material to be, based on the

following advice from Douglas Day in *Swifter than Reason*, I will be using both the 1930s edition as well as the revised 1957 edition:

> There is a final obstacle between Graves and the critic, and it is a large one: the matter of texts. Periodically throughout his career Graves has gone through his poetic corpus, suppressed those poems which have seemed to him inferior, and drastically revised those which he has chosen to retain. Thus a poem originally published, say, in *Over the Brazier* (1916) might reappear, its structure and diction markedly altered in *Poems, 1914-1926*, only to be dropped from the contents of *Collected Poems, 1938*—and then turn up again, its face once more lifted, in *Collected Poems, 1955*. Such thorough and ceaseless pruning has been almost invariably beneficial to the poems subjected to it (Randall Jarrell has said that Graves is "the best re-writer and corrector of his own poetry" that he knows); but, commendable as it may be, this habit has created no small textual problem for the critic. Good as the poems in Graves's collection of 1961 are, they must not be taken as representative of anything more than the sort of poetry Graves chose to write in 1961. To see what he was like in 1916, one must read the volume that was published that year. (xiii-xiv)

After reviewing both editions of the autobiography extensively, Day's point and advice proved to ring true for multiple reasons. *Goodbye to All That* focuses on Graves's early life, his time during World War I, and the time shortly thereafter. The autobiography is cited by almost every researcher of Grave's work providing as a seminal insight into the author's life, way of thinking, and style of writing. Given the variations between the original edition and the republication, I will include sections from both when the material

necessitates, offering the alternate readings for chosen selections within the footnotes if there are substantial differences.

Martin Seymour-Smith has published two biographies. Published in 1982, *Robert Graves, His Life and Work* is the larger and more significant of the two, offering an informative look at impressive life of the poet. Chapters are divided according to years of Robert Graves's life from 1895–1981. Originally published in 1956, *Writers & Their Work: Robert Graves* was released much earlier than other biographies and focuses primarily on Graves's writings. In 1995, Miranda Seymour, a daughter of Martin Seymour-Smith, wrote another biography entitled *Robert Graves, Life on the Edge*, and breaks Robert Graves's life into sections based on the influential women of his life at that time with each section being further broken down into years as well. *Robert Graves, the Assault Heroic 1895–1926,* first published in 1986*,* offers a less impersonal biography about the poet as compared to than the works of Miranda Seymour and Martin Seymour-Smith, likely due to the uniqueness of the author, Richard Perceval Graves, who is Robert Graves's nephew and a son of Robert's youngest brother John Tiarks Ranke. The sentiment of *Assault Heroic* is one of Richard's love, respect, and long-held admiration for his uncle. *Assault Heroic* sets to accomplish one primary purpose: to create a "greater understanding of the truths which the poet seeks to express" through expanding readers' understanding of his uncle with relatabilities or empathetic connections to the personal experiences and the resulting effects of Robert Graves through sharing the observations, thoughts, and other influences in his life (xix). What I find the most impressive in Richard Graves's biography is how well he documents his research and that he included many of his earlier thoughts and observations in the biography. Released in 2018, Jean

Moorcroft Wilson published *Robert Graves, From Great War Poet to Goodbye to All That (1895–1929),* one of the most recent biographies of note, in which she attempts to give a deeper recounting of the poet's earlier life. Using these four biographies helps me to better analyze the life of Robert Graves from well-researched nonpersonal, outside perspectives.

In addition to the biographies which focus primarily on his life and actions, numerous essays, speeches, and interviews have also been published by of Robert Graves himself, many of which explain the writer's own literary theories and methods. These publications are best read in chronological order, with ideas, concepts, opinions, and ideologies changing as Graves aged through his life, sometimes drastically from publication to publication. While there is no singular published compilation within which to find all of these materials, there are multiple collections available. These publications from Robert Graves include: the annotated edition of *On English Poetry Being an Irregular Approach to the Psychology of This Art, From Evidence Mainly Subjective* (1922), *Poetic Unreason* (originally published in 1925 and reprinted in 1968), *Robert Graves, On Poetry: Collected Talks and Essays* (1969), *Oxford Addresses on Poetry* (1961), *Difficult Questions Easy Answers* (1973), and a collaborative effort with close friend and fellow-writer, Laura Riding, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (first published in 1928 and reprinted in 1969). Even still, there are also other crucial sources that focus on the life and works of Robert Graves which are often cited as seminal and require consultation. These sources include Douglas Day's *Swifter than Reason, the Poetry and Criticism of Robert Graves* and Frank Kersnowski's collection entitled *Conversation with Robert Graves* (1989), which gives first-hand accounts of personal exchanges with the

poet and expresses how Robert Graves was perceived by journalist, other writers, and members of literary esteem.

There have been at least two masters dissertations which have looked at the poetry of Robert Graves. In 1970, Nedra Drake looked at the overall presence of World War I within Graves's poetry in her thesis, *World War I in the Life and Poetry of Robert Graves* for the University of North Texas in Denton. More recently in 2015, Joram Van Acker wrote a thesis for Gent University in Belgium entitled *Working Through the War: Processing Wartime Trauma in Post-War Literature of the First World War*, where Van Acker looks at multiple poets of the First World War, only briefly discussing Graves. While both of these theses are well done, neither of these writers were veterans and neither suffer from neurasthenia or post-traumatic stress disorder.

THE GREAT WAR

Although much of Europe had already been in a time of growing political unrest in the early twentieth century, it is widely agreed that World War I officially began in 1914 as a result of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. By 6 August 1914, the British Empire, France, and Russia joined Austria in the war against the allied Serbia and Germany. Conventions of gentlemen's warfare faded as an obsolete memory and trench warfare became the new reality after Germany made advances to invade France. Hundreds of miles of trenches were dug into the earth, with enemy forces being separated sometimes by as little as fifty yards. The first trenches began simple like ditches, but as the war progressed, their importance began to change from temporary solutions to more permanent necessities for either side. Over time, these trench systems became more elaborate, with dirt-walled halls branching and forking into different lanes with multiple

purposes such as: supply lines, communications, fire lines, forward listening posts, underground headquarter offices, and billeting and other rooms where soldiers would sleep. The trenches began to be built with sturdier materials, including sandbags and wooden and concrete supports and structures. The areas between the opposing forces entrenchments became known as *no-man's land*. No-man's land was often large areas of terrain that had been scorched, scarred, and pocketed from repeated mortar and artillery rounds and with numerous rows of barbed wire to slow any enemy advance. The face of warfare also changed with other technological advances, including improvements on armaments like machine guns, mortars, and artillery as well as the evolution of air power through the expanded uses and designs of balloons and the introduction of motorized aircraft and aeroplanes which began as observation vehicles and later adapted, armed, and repurposed as the war progressed.

The entire Somme Conflict was comprised of numerous large-scale battles. On 22 April 1915, the Second Battle of Ypres began. It was during this conflict that the German forces released poison gas as a weapon (Hickman, "Second Battle of Ypres"). On 21 February 1916, German troops launched the Battle of Verdun which lasted until December, making the operation the longest battle on the Western front despite either side making any real advances or gains in territorial control and with between 700,000–900,000 casualties combined (Hickman, "Battle of Verdun"). In response to the Battle of Verdun, British and French troops launched the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916, with the campaign lasting until 18 November 1916. Like the Battle of Verdun, it would also prove to be a costly campaign for all involved. On 1 July alone, the first day of the battle, the British lost more than 50,000 troops (Hickman, "The Battle of the Somme"). The

Somme conflict saw numerous historical military milestones, including the first use of armored tanks in battle and the introduction and implementation of chemical warfare, a horrific method of indiscriminate killing which is currently outlawed by the Geneva Conventions, with both sides using chlorine, mustard, and phosgene gasses.

World War I ended 11 November 1918, Armistice Day. Today, it is easy enough to find audio recordings online of the ceasefires at the trenches of France, where the sounds of artillery and gunfire are eerily replaced with a deafening silence. The fighting that had lasted for years and been responsible for millions of deaths suddenly just stopped. The Great War was widely thought to be the *war to end all wars*; however, despite the massive casualties and financial and structural losses to so many, history shows that it was not. World War II began 1 September 1939, only two months shy of two decades after Armistice Day.

ROBERT GRAVES

On 24 July 1895, Robert Graves was born the middle child of five in Wimbledon, England. His father was Alfred Percival Graves, a "well-known Irish poet and songwriter," and his mother was Amalie Elisabeth Sophie von Ranke, the niece of the famed German historian Leopold von Ranke (*Writers & Their Work* 6). Robert Graves attended numerous public schools during his youth, with Charterhouse (a public all-boys school) being where he would graduate, where he learned to box (a skill which would earn him respect later in his time with the military), and where he began writing poetry.

Robert Graves was able to obtain an officer commission "a day or two" after the declaration of World War I, believing the shared thoughts and misconceptions that "a very short war was expected—two or three months at the very outside"; however he "did

not work out the possibilities of being actively engaged in war" and quickly found himself "in the trenches a few months later" (*GTAT-Red.* 60-61). Graves joined with the Royal Welch Fusiliers[1], a regiment with a long and proud and often defiant history[2]. He would go on to serve on the front lines and in the trenches of France more than once. Graves describes the conditions of his introduction to these trenches in his autobiography:

> The wet and slippery trench ran through dull red clay. I had a torch with me, and saw that hundreds of field mice and frogs had fallen into the trench but found no way out. The light dazzled them, and because I could not help treading on them, I put the torch back in my pocket. We had no mental picture of what the trenches would be like, and were almost as ignorant as a young soldier who joined us a week or two later. […] The field-telephone wires had been fastened by staples to the side of the trench, and when it rained the staples were constantly falling out and the wire falling down and tripping people up. If it sagged too much, one stretched it across the trench to the other side to correct the sag, but then it would catch one's head. The holes were sump-pits used for draining the trenches. (*GTAT-Red.* 82–83)

Daily life in the trenches held incomprehensible and horrendous conditions for almost every soldier of World War I. Even with numerous accounts and photographs, it is difficult a century later to imagine living in such harsh realities. Due to the persistent

[1] [sic]. According to Graves in his autobiography, the Army Council allowed the continued wearing of the regimental traditional flash with their uniform and "as an additional favour it consented to recognize another defiant regimental peculiarity: the spelling of the word 'Welch' with a *c*. This permission was published in a special Army Council Instruction of 1919. … The spelling with a c was as important to [the regiment] as the badge worn at the back of the cap was to the Gloucesters…" (*GTAT-Red.* 75).
[2] "'Welch' referred [the regiment] somehow to the archaic North Wales of Henry Tudor and Owen Glendower and Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the founder of the regiment; it dissociated [them] from the modern North Wales of chapels, Liberalism, the dairy and drapery business, slate mines, and tourist trade" (*GTAT-Red.* 75).

inclement weather and rain of France, which only worsened as a result of the constant fighting, nature added even more difficulties. The rains would flood drench everything, including the soldiers, and the changing seasons each held their own troubles, with winters bringing extreme freezes, snow, and dangers of frostbite and with summers increasing the levels of rain and the insect populations. The trenches suffered from drainage problems which would fill with water from the rains, weakening the integrity of the trench sidings and other structures. Sickness was always a worry, including a condition commonly known as trench foot or immersion foot syndrome which could result in nerve damage, blisters, gangrene, or even amputation. Rodents and insects were a major concern and lice were a common occurrence which was difficult to treat in the circumstances. If all of this wasn't bad enough, soldiers also had to constantly remain vigilant and alert, trying to avoid catching a lucky round from rifle and machine gun fire, a well-placed shot from a patient sniper, incoming artillery shells, and anything else the opposing forces may send across no-man's land.

Graves fought in many conflicts and battles, including the Battle of Loos and the Battle of the Somme, where Robert Graves found himself thrust to the forefront of the fighting. One major offensive during the Somme campaign was the Battle of Mametz Wood, a dense wooded area roughly "a mile wide and over a mile deep" that was held by the "well-trained and elite Lehr Regiment of Prussian Guards" who had fortified their positions with "machine guns, trenches and mortars" (Carradice). This offensive would have one of the deepest impacts on Robert Graves as he, along with his unit, the 38th Division, which included the Royal Welch Fusiliers, began their advance to capture Mametz Wood. This part of the Somme campaign lasted from 7 July 1916 until 12 July

1916, only five days, but considering the push was expected to be accomplished in only a matter of a few hours, the toll was devasting to the Welch Division, including the death of "forty-six officers and five hundred fifty-six other ranks" with the total casualties, including wounded and men "listed as 'missing'—men blown to pieces or buried alive by shell blasts," being estimated at three thousand nine hundred ninety-three personnel, with four hundred casualties on the first day alone (Carradice). The level of violence is almost unfathomable, with corpses, carnage, and what may only be described as hell on Earth. After the battle had been won and the Allied Forces controlled Mametz Wood, Robert Graves recorded his perceptions as he searched through the remains for overcoats to use as blankets against the cold: "[Mametz Wood] was full of dead Prussian Guards Reserve, big men, and of Royal Welch and South Wales Borderers of the New Army battalions, little men. Not a single tree in the wood remained unbroken" (*GTAT-Red.* 175)[3]. It was from this moment where everything Graves had witnessed would be forever documented in his poem "A Dead Boche," a poem which I have analyzed in a later chapter of this thesis.

The bullets and mortar rounds were not the only threat to fear and human remains were not the only casualties strewn across the land. Graves notes in *Goodbye to All That*:

> Wounded and prisoners came streaming past us in the half-light. I was shocked by the dead horses and mules; human corpses were all very well, but it seemed wrong for animals to be dragged into the war like this. [… We] found ourselves on the fringe of Mametz Wood, among the dead of our own New Army battalions

[3] "Mametz Wood was full of dead Prussian Guards Reserve, big men, and of Royal Welch and South Wales Borderers of the new-army battalions, little men. There was not a single tree in the wood unbroken" (*GTAT-1930ed.* 252–53).

> who had helped to capture it. There we halted in thick mist. The Germans had been using lachrymatory shell [(tear gas)], and the mist held the fumes, making us cough. We tried to smoke, but our cigarettes tasted of gas, so we threw them away. Later, we cursed ourselves for fools, because it was our throats, not the cigarettes, that were affected. (*GTAT-Red.* 173–74)[4]

Though there are records of the of physical damages he received, the true extent of mental damage and lasting fears that Graves harbored from the war (including smells that would trigger crippling anxiety and memories of the German gas attacks) could only be assessed through observations and his own later testimonies of the conditions that persisted for the rest of his life. However, Mametz Wood was only one of the many conflicts in which Robert Graves would be a part of.

During the fighting on 19 July 1916, Graves was seriously wounded during the battle to reclaim High Wood. Graves pieced together the events as best he could in his autobiography:

> The Germans put down a barrage along the ridge where we were lying, and we lost about a third of the battalion before our show started. I was one of the casualties. It was heavy stuff, six and eight inch [artillery shells]. There was so much of it that we decided to move back fifty yards; it was when I was running that an eight-inch shell burst about three paces behind me…. I heard the explosion

[4] Wounded men and prisoners come streaming past us. What struck me most was the number of dead horses and mules lying about; human corpses I was accustomed to, but it seemed wrong for animals to be dragged into the war like this. …[We] found ourselves on the fringe of Mametz Wood, among the dead of our new-army battalions that had been attacking Mametz Wood. We halted in thick mist. The Germans had been using lachrymatory shell [tear gas] and the mist held the fumes; we coughed and swore. We tried to smoke, but the gas had got into the cigarettes, so we threw them away. Later we wished we had not, because it was not the cigarettes that had been affected so much as our own throats. (*GTAT-1930ed.* 250)

> and felt as though I had been punched rather hard between the shoulder-blades, but no sensation of pain. I thought that the punch was merely the shock of the explosion; then blood started trickling into my eye and I felt faint and called to Moodie: "I've been hit." Then I fell down…. One piece of shell went through my left thigh, high up near the groin; I must have been at the full stretch of my stride to have escaped emasculation. The wound over my eye was nothing; it was a little chip of marble…. This and a finger wound, which split the bone, probably came from another shell that burst in front of me. The main wound was made by a piece of shell that went in two inches below the point of my right shoulder and came out through my chest two inches above my right nipple, in a line between it and the base of my neck. (GTAT-1930*ed*. 261–2)[5]

Graves was transported to a field hospital and his command was informed that he would not survive. The commander believed that Graves was killed in action as a result of his wounds and sent a letter confirming his presumed death to Graves's family, offering condolences, reassurances that he had not died a painful death, and speaking of his valiant efforts and gallantry. Robert Graves was instead transported by rail to a nearby hospital only to be evacuated to the Number Eight Hospital at Rouen where he discovered that his official status was listed as deceased, a fact made even more ironic in

[5] The Germans put down a barrage along our ridge where we were lying, and we lost a third of the battalion before our show started. I was one of the casualties. The German batteries were handing out heavy stuff, six- and eight-inch [artillery shells], and so much of it that we decided to move back fifty yards at a rush. As we did so, an eight-inch shell burst three paces behind me. I heard the explosion, and felt as though I had been punched rather hard between the shoulder-blades, but without any pain. I took the punch merely for the shock of the explosion; but blood trickled into my eye and, turning faint, I called to Moodie: 'I've been hit.' Then I fell…. One piece of shell went through my left thigh, high up, near the groin; I must have been at the full stretch of my stride to escape emasculation. The wound over my eye was made by a little chip of marble… This, and a finger-wound which split the bone, probably came from another shell bursting in front of me. But a piece of shell had also gone in two inches below the point of my right shoulder-blade and came out through my chest two inches above the right nipple. (*GTAT-Red.* 180–81)

that 25 July 1916 was his twenty-first birthday (*GTAT-Red.* 184–85). A few days later in September, Graves returned to Paddington, England where he met up with his friend and fellow soldier and writer, Siegfried Sassoon.

During this time together, Graves and Sassoon worked to edit and organize their poems, offering suggestions and ideas to one another, producing Sassoon's *Old Huntsman* and Graves's *Fairies and Fusiliers*, his second collection of poems written during the war. Graves explains in *Goodbye to All That* that he and Sassoon "defined the war in [their] poems. With Siegfried it was hunting, nature, music, and pastoral scenes; with me, chiefly children. In France, I used to spend much of my spare time playing with the French children of the villages in which we were billeted" (191)[6]. Later, in his *Collected Poems* published in 1938, Graves included a foreword explaining that "the emotion underlying [*Fairies and Fusiliers*] was a frank fear of physical death" (qtd. in *Robert Graves War Poems* 40). Whether it was time that changed his mind or the loss of Sassoon's friendship after the publishing of *Goodbye to All That*, Robert Graves's views appeared to shift as he aged.

By December 1916, Robert Graves went before a medical board where he requested to be sent back into service overseas. In January 1917, he returned to the theatre of Frises on the Somme. This time Graves "went back as an old soldier, as [his] kit and baggage proved," with the addition, replacement, or discarding of items to be better equipped with what he had learned would be beneficial over standard-issue items

[6] "We defined the war in our poems by making contrasted definitions of peace. With Siegfried it was hunting and nature and music and pastoral scenes; with me it was chiefly children. When I was in France I used to spend much of my spare time playing with the French children of the villages in which I was billeted. I put them into my poems, and my own childhood at Harlech. I called my book *Fairies and Fusiliers*, and dedicated it to the regiment" (*GTAT-1930ed*. 277).

(*GTAT-Red.* 196). However, instead of returning to the trenches as expected, Graves was put in command over the headquarter company after the doctor in France—who was unhappy about Graves's "coming back so soon" from England—reported to the commanding officer that Graves was "in his opinion, unfit for trench service" (*GTAT-Red.* 196, 194). Despite his appointed position, Graves reported that he would still visit the trenches every night and take the soldiers rations.

Robert Graves would continue to serve through the remainder of the war and for a short time after, filling in for different positions and duties fit for his rank as Captain, to include sitting on field general court-martials and taking an instructor position at an officer-cadet battalion until the cadet-battalions were closed down and the officers sent on leave and ordered to report back to their primary units in December 1918. Missing his report-no-later-than date, Graves instead decided to take an extended leave due to his wife Nancy's pregnancy. After the birth of his daughter, Jenny, on 12 January 1919, Graves rejoined his battalion at Castle Barracks, Limerick in western Ireland (*GTAT-Red.* 229–30). But after he had been in Ireland a short while, and in addition to holding no ill feelings towards the Irish folk, Graves began to feel that his "new loyalty to Nancy and Jenny tended to overshadow regimental loyalty, now that the war seemed to be over" (*GTAT-Red.* 229)[7]. Graves managed to get his demobilization orders the day before troop movements were to be restricted. He hastily ran off for freedom, despite his command trying to make him stay, leaving Ireland without the proper authorization codes required on the order. Graves returned to England to find that the London Electric Railway men

[7] "I realized too that I had a new loyalty, to Nancy and the baby, tending to overshadow regimental loyalty now that the war was over" (*GTAT-1930ed*. 332).

were going on strike and decided to leave the train at Paddington and continue home by road (*GTAT-Red.* 233). Graves "seized the only taxi in sight" and offered to share the ride with another officer and his wife due to the shortage of cabs. During their ride, the officer told Graves that he wished he could show their gratitude. Graves replied:

> Well there's only one thing in the world that I want at the moment. But you can't give it to me, I'm afraid. And that's the secret code-marks to complete my demobilization papers. I've bolted from Ireland without them, and there'll be hell to pay if the Wimbledon people send me back. (*GTAT-Red.* 233)[8]

The man then stopped the cab directly. As the other officer got out of the cab, he informed Graves that he just so happened to be the Cork District Demobilization Officer who could provide those codes and, while retrieving his luggage, exclaimed "and here's the whole bag of tricks" (*GTAT-Red.* 233; Nicolson 93). It was out of his act of kindness and luck that Graves had everything he needed for when he would arrive to Wimbledon. So it was that in February 1919, Robert Graves managed to secure a release from his army commission, ending his time in military service and returning to civilian life.

Graves would go on to study for a short time at the University of Oxford and St. Johns College. Though he failed his bachelor's program, he still managed to get a Bachelor of Letters by writing his thesis, *The Illogical Element in English Poetry*, which he found "difficult to write […] in the required academic style, and [so he] decided to

[8] On the way to Waterloo, he said to me: "I wish there was some way of showing our gratitude. I wish there was something we could do for you." I said: "Well, there is only one thing in the world that I want at the moment. But you can't give it to me, I'm afraid. And that," I said, "is the proper code-marks to complete my demobilization papers. I've bolted from Ireland without them, and there'll be hell to pay if the Wimbledon people send me back." He rapped on the glass of the taxi and stopped it. Then he got down his bag, opened it, and produced a satchel of army forms. He said: "Well, I happen to be the Cork District Demobilization Officer and I've got the whole bag of tricks here." So he filled my papers in. (*GTAT-1930ed.* 337).

make it an ordinary book" (*GTAT-Red.* 261). He went on to teach English Literature at the University of Cairo in Egypt before returning shortly to London and eventually moving to Deià, Mallorca, the largest of the Balearic Islands of Spain. In 1936 during the Spanish Civil War, he was forced to leave Spain, making his way back to England.

Graves and his family were still in the United Kingdom when World War II broke out. Three of his four children joined the Armed Forces, with his daughters Jenny and Catherine enlisting with the British Women's Auxiliary Air Force (W.A.A.F.) and his son, David, following Robert Grave's influence, joining the First Royal Welch. David was killed in action in March 1943 at Burma in the Arakan peninsula and "the War office turned down [David's] recommendation for a posthumous Victoria Cross on the ground that the attack had failed" (*GTAT-Red.* 280). Robert Graves also tried to reenlist with the army, even volunteering for infantry service, but he was not accepted, being "informed that His Majesty could not employ [Graves] except in a sedentary appointment" (*GTAT-Red.* 280). Instead of being able to return to the front lines, he found a position as an Air Raid Warden in South Devon. Graves was later able to return to Mallorca where he lived out his life until his death.

During his life, Robert Graves was an essayist, family man, critic, soldier, novelist, translator, and, above all else, he was a poet. He passed away in December 1985 and was the last surviving poet honored by the Memorial to First War Poets in Westminster Abbey. But Graves never considered himself to be a war poet. As Frank Kersnowski most eloquently describes: "[Graves] was not one of those made a poet by war […] Graves, even during World War I, was never a war poet, but a poet who wrote about war" (*Early Poetry* 34). That distinction, though it may seem to be a matter of

semantics to some, is an affirmation of hope for me. It signifies that hopefully, much like Robert Graves, my life may also not be defined solely by my time in war or its effects.

NEURASTHENIA

As if the physical injuries that Robert Graves sustained in battles weren't enough, World War I left its imprint on his mental state as well. Neurasthenia or "nerve weakness," more frequently known today as Shell Shock, was a common problem for returning combat veterans of The Great War (Presley 269)[9]. John Presley writes in his article "Neurasthenia and the Cure of Literature: Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Andy Collins" that "Graves's biographies overflow with details of his war experiences, from his letters home and his letters to friends and literary correspondents" and it is easy to see that by 1916 Graves had begun to "feel suicidal, 'empty and lost'" (270–71). In fact, Graves did attempt to kill himself, jumping out of a third-story window shortly after Laura Riding had jumped from the fourth, an attempted dual-suicide of which both survived (*Life and Work* 166–169). It was after his attempted suicide during Riding's recovery from her injuries that Graves wrote *Goodbye to All That*. As Frank Kersnowski explains, the autobiography's best appeal and value "rest in Graves's explaining the experiences of those who fought in World War I to those who did not. Yet on reflection, his readers must realize the difference between their understandings and Graves's" (*Early Poetry* 34). Though war in general has always taken a heavy toll on combatants, the soldiers of the first world war experienced a rapidly evolving style of warfare that had

[9] *Oxford English Dictionary* defines Shell Shock as:

> A disorder identified in soldiers in the First World War (1914–18), attributed to exposure to shell-fire and characterized by severe anxiety and other psychological disturbances, often accompanied by somatic symptoms such as rapid heartbeat and nervous tics. Now chiefly historical. ("Shell Shock" *OED.com*)

never existed on such scale or length of time before, and although Graves had survived to endure until after it had finished, he did not survive unscathed.

George Miller Beard provided the initial description and diagnosis of Neurasthenia in 1869 with symptoms including: "fatigue, anxiety, headache, neuralgia, and depression" (Presley 272). The more modern diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is often compared with Neurasthenia and is widely considered to be primarily psychological, although those understandings are constantly evolving with new research. PTSD presents many similarities with Neurasthenia—to include instances of anxiety, hypervigilance, aggressive defensive attitudes, nightmares, mood swings, including bouts of uncontrollable fear, sadness, and anger, flashbacks, and other involuntary physical and mental responses. Neurasthenia, likewise labeled as a psychosomatic disorder, also involves observable irregular neurological symptoms. However, the dissimilarities of the two diagnoses vary enough to maintain them as two separate conditions. Of course, not all agree on the matter. John Presley does not acknowledge much difference in the distinctions, calling neurasthenia "a diagnosis of 'nerve weakness' [that] is a historical precursor of the diagnostic terms that were used in World Wars I (shell-shock) and II (combat fatigue), and on into the Vietnam War (post-traumatic stress disorder) era" (269). Regardless of medical specifics, it seems as though each war not only seeks to redefine the levels of violence that humanity can create, but also to redefine the resulting aftermath as well.

Neurasthenia was a complicated topic to research and understand in the early days of World War I. The diagnostic process was made even more complex given that not every case shared the same symptoms. Medical professionals were hard-pressed to

explain not only what neurasthenia actually was, but also how soldiers became afflicted in the first place. Neurasthenia was not simply an affliction of the mind; it also affected the nervous system to varying degrees. If it was hard to understand for veterans who had witnessed firsthand others suffering from shell shock, but it was even more difficult for civilians to comprehend.

Abram Kardiner, M.D., and Herbert Spiegel, M.D., try to explain the condition to the general public in their book *War Stress and Neurotic Illness in 1941*, providing their conclusions from research as well as patient-case examples. Due to the fluidity of warfare and the changes within the field of medical sciences, *War Stress and Neurotic Illness* provides one of the best analyses close to the approximate time period to ensure authenticity of observations at the time during and directly following World War I, despite the advancements of medical research. Kardiner and Spiegel explain that:

> during the early onset of the conditions, those "in the fresh state [] received the name of 'neurocirculatory asthenia,' 'effort syndrome,' 'soldier's heart,'[and] 'war neurasthenia,'" going to also point out that "very likely a large number of case were described as Graves' disease. Many of them, prior to the use of basal metabolism as a criterion, were mistaken for true Graves' disease" but that "a continuous series of stages exists between the case that show merely autonomic disorders, and true Graves' disease, with all its characteristic symptoms and increased basal metabolism" [sic]. (Kardiner et al. 113)[10]

[10] Robert Graves has no significance or affect to the naming of Graves's Disease (or Graves' Disease [sic] as written by Kardiner and Spiegel.) According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the entomology of Graves's Disease is "the name of Dr. R. J. Graves of Dublin, who in 1835 recognized the individuality of the disease" ("Graves's Disease," *OED.com*.) The condition is defined that: 'The diseased condition also called Basedow's disease and exophthalmic goitre. It is characterized by enlargement of the thyroid,

War is a strain on everyone involved no matter their role, but it is especially so to those on the front lines. How can anyone differentiate what so-called *normal* behaviors should be expected from returning veterans versus cases of Neurasthenia? Kardiner and Spiegel explain that:

> …the normal state for the soldier in battle is fatigue and fear. The condition is not incompatible with his ability to keep on fighting; it is not incapacitating. On the contrary, it is an incentive to be vigilant, effective, and cooperative, to make the most of his situation. (44)

The constant state of hypervigilance can sometimes borderline on what some may perceive as near-paranoia, but it is essential to surviving in an environment where people are actively trying to kill one another and often a momentary slip of complacency is all that is needed for mistakes to be made which get someone killed. Any person who suffers from Neurasthenia may try to avoid circumstances which could set off their anxiety or other symptomatic responses over which they have no control.

Kardiner and Spiegel attempt to further explain the life and expectations of a soldier in war as well as the different neurotic illnesses that result from combat. Fatigue is one of the baselines used for all soldiers in their research and the additional symptoms vary depending on the disease diagnosed. Neurasthenia (Shell Shock) is considered to be one of the more traumatic neuroses with lasting, long-term chronic problems. War Neurasthenia is diagnosed differently from the civilian psychosomatic disorder equivalents primarily because, as Kardiner and Spiegel argue, the effects of past

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protrusion of the eyeballs, and persistent palpitation' (New Sydenham Soc. Lexicon 1886)" (qtd. in "Graves's Disease," *OED.com*).

traumatic events experienced in war affect subconscious or undeliberate reactions to anxiety or triggers that remind the person of the initial event (113). Kardiner and Spiegel explain that the acute stages can include "vomiting, enuresis, diarrhea, and sweating," as well as other symptoms such as increased heart rates, fainting, tremors, blackouts, and more that may differ from person to person (113). Edgar Jones writes that "first world war commanders and military psychiatrists believed that soldiers broke down, or succumbed to shell shock, because they had not been sufficiently hardened" (Jones 231). Jones also writes that "Lord Southborough concluded that civilians did not make natural warriors and that much effort was required to turn them into competent soldiers" (231). There were many others to offer their own different opinions on the subject, but it is one thing to make assumptions from secondhand observations and study versus being one of the boots on the frontline, although even then there are no clear answers. An example of this type of personal conflict can be seen in Michele Barrett's article "Pat Barker's 'Regeneration' Trilogy and the Freudianization of Shell Shock" where he writes about "a Dr. Rivers who is conflicted between his duty as a Royal Army Medical Corps officer, which is to return men to the front, and his responsibility as a physician, which is to heal them" (245). Despite being a fellow soldier, Dr. Rivers also did not understand the condition, how it affected people, what the extent of the effects fully entailed, or how to respond to those suffering from shell shock medically or sympathetically, even as a fellow man in uniform.

Kardiner and Spiegel do explain and discuss some of the observable effects of Neurasthenia which they refer to as "defensive ceremonials and tics" which mimic either what actions the person took when the trauma occurred or what their instincts and

subconscious tell them they should have taken (105).[11] Kardiner and Spiegel describe the three types of ceremonials and tics as: 1.) the unconscious "defensive reaction actually engaged in during the original traumatic event;" 2.) "a compulsory act which the [person] carries out without knowing exactly why, but which relieves him if anxiety;" and 3.) a more severe but less common type "in which a series of tics involved practically every part of the body […] a fragmented, interrupted, and piece-meal convulsion… [and] there is a lack of the coordination and purposiveness in the [previous two types]" (105–06). The first type can manifest physically or in the person's demeanor, such as being shot in the shoulder and since displaying unconscious sudden jerking motions with that injured shoulder, driving over an explosive and subsequently becoming nauseated with the potential of riding in any mode of transportation thereafter, or even displaying an aggressively "defensive attitude […] constantly on the alert for something to happen" (105–6). The second type of ceremonial tics are "usually carried out with no more control of the will than is shown [in the first type]" but these tics may have no discernable correlation to the initial trauma and "a group of ceremonials, impulsive postures, and attitudes are, so to speak, correctives" (106). As examples: one person with this type may develop a compulsive need to constantly check their watch without an ascertainable reason; another may find themselves assuming a defensive stance anytime a person they subconsciously deem a threat enters a shared space; and yet another may religiously form a strict morning routine which, if deviated from or interrupted, can create extreme anxieties or panic for their entire day. For those who display this second type of

[11]Kardiner and Spiegel describe "defensive ceremonials and tics" as "chiefly unconscious defense reactions against the original trauma" or "a more complete elaboration of a defensive reaction that was not carried out on the original traumatic occasion" (105-06).

ceremonial tics, there are no singular responses that apply to all. Each person may have completely unique tics that they develop. The key to this second type is that the developed tics have no obvious connection to the initial trauma, but the persons are comforted by the responsive action even though they may not be aware that they are doing the action. The third type of ceremonial tic, while less common, is considered the most severe category. Some who suffer from this type may appear to violently shake all over, thrash or convulse without provocation, become obsessively compulsive, experience paralyzing anxiety, night terrors, paranoia, possible bouts of hysteria, and other debilitating symptoms.

If I were to be diagnosed under the term of Neurasthenia rather than undiagnosed anxiety or PTSD, I would be classified to display both types one and two. During part of my convoy duties in Iraq, I drove the maintenance M915's, Freightliner Tractors (also known as a semi-trucks or lorries) that bobtailed (traveled without a trailer) and carried necessary tools, towing equipment, additional tires, and multiple vehicle parts which may be needed if another truck is damaged during an attack on the roads. Our convoy group witnessed numerous types of attacks either directed at us or at other convoy teams. We saw small-arms fire, which refers to shots fired from handguns, assault rifles, or large-caliber mounted weapons. We were attacked with rocket-propelled grenades (RPG's) which are self-explanatory and handheld fragmentation grenades being dropped from above was a constant concern at every overpass. Homemade spike strips were typically no more than long wooden board with numerous large nails hammered through them, either hidden in ditches, covered with sand on the road, or manually deployed onto the road as vehicles drove by with the intent to flatten multiple tires and stop the convoy for

larger attacks. Mortar fire was less common, though the effectiveness of striking the moving trucks was always hit-or-miss. The largest threats were mines, vehicle-borne improvised explosive devises (VBIED's), and improvised explosive devices (IED's). VBIED's are large explosives hidden within vehicles that can be parked wherever one desired, such as next to a base fence, building, or on the side of a road, and then detonated. They may also be driven into a target by a suicide-attacker which can be a serious concern for convoys, including the heavily armored tanks. The IED's were constantly evolving in how they were deployed and the methods of detonations. Buried in potholes in the road, hidden in guardrails, placed behind rocks, covered with trash… the possibilities of where to place them are innumerable. These IED's can be detonated with timers, pressure-triggers, tripwires, cellular phones, etc., and if one device was not enough, these IED's can also be connected to others resulting in multiple detonated explosions with a single trigger, creating what is known as a daisy-chain. There were still more means of attack and other dangers, but these were the most common threats convoy teams faced. Due to my experiences, I have since began to have my own tics.

My experience with type one is a direct result of an IED detonation where the explosives had been hidden in a drainage pipe that crossed beneath the Main Supply Route (MSR). Since returning, I have experienced a few times where my trained response overrode my cognitive reactions. One recent example was 4 July 2016. While driving home with my family from town, a group of irresponsible drunks set off a mortar firework which accidentally toppled over and fired into the road as we were passing. The mortar round exploded directly in front of my Jeep. Without thinking, I swerved the vehicle into the left lane and assumed a defensive search for the source and any other

threats. According to my wife, I was no longer there. Mentally, she said that I had instantly gone back to the war and that she had to make multiple attempts to calm me down and bring me back. I had instinctually resorted to my training which we had utilized numerous times. In hindsight, the more natural response that I believe I should have taken was to move right to the shoulder of the road and stop, not to place my own vehicle, and my family, into oncoming traffic and continue on. But this was not the only time that my training has kicked in as a response over otherwise rational reactive thought. My wife has told me that there have been numerous times where I will steer to avoid trash or wires on the road and that I have a tendency to notice what she thinks to be obscure or unnoticeable while I'm driving, not realizing that I am constantly scanning for potential threats. This is not always a negative habit though. In fact, in the dark early morning hours in December 2019 while we were on a family trip to Washington D.C., I spotted a car which had swerved off the road deep into the nearby woods nearly twenty yards from the pavement. The car had no lights on and there were no streetlights for miles. Turning around to inspect the vehicle, we found an inebriated, injured woman who said she had been stuck in the car for hours and that no one had stopped to help her. We immediately called emergency services, waited for their arrival of three state-troopers, two fire engines, and the ambulance, and then, since I used to be a volunteer firefighter in Florida and my wife is a nurse, we helped with the extraction and loading of the woman into the ambulance. One of the patrols said that they had driven by the area repeatedly over the last few hours without seeing the vehicle and that he had no idea how I had managed to spot it. Honestly, I have no other explanation other than that I have developed a habit, or tic if you will, of constantly scanning while I drive.

For type two, my wife tells me that I exhibit multiple tics and ceremonies. I cannot sit with my back to a door and I must always know where the exits are. I assess every person nearby and identify who I believe presents the largest threats, regardless of where we go or whether we know the other people present. My wife tells me that I *bow up* or *swell* (her words) every time I feel that there are any threats to me or my family. If I become frustrated, I develop a compulsive need to itch my face (usually my nose) or scratch my head, arms, or upper torso without realizing I am doing it. I also struggle with spontaneity, always preferring to have a routine to follow or some form of a plan established for any events that will affect my routines. Without either routine or plan, I become increasingly anxious and at times my attitude has become aggressively frustrated as a result of not knowing what to expect. Most often, I am unaware that I am displaying any of these tendencies and I prefer that they not be pointed out when they occur as it is embarrassing not to be cognizant of performing these habits. Looking at my research of Robert Graves, I believe that he also displays both types one and two of Kardiner and Spiegel's list and that his mannerisms were noticed by people he met.

Robert Graves had his own hypothesis on neurasthenia and developed his own theory on a general timeline which the condition would progress in the field, despite being without extensive medical or psychiatric training. Graves believed that, "For the first three weeks, an officer was of little use in the front line; he did not know his way about, had not learned the rules of health and safety, or grown accustomed to recognizing degrees of danger" (*GTAT-Red.* 143). The new officers had to learn a lot during this time, both for survival and to be useful in their new positions. But these green officers did not stay useless. Graves goes on to explain that, "Between three weeks and four months he

was at his best, unless he happened to have any particular bad shock or sequence of shocks. Then his usefulness gradually declined as neurasthenia developed" (143). When Graves was formulating his theories, he was at five months in theatre and considered himself: "past [his] prime", about to enter his next timeframe which he describes as:

> "At six months he was still more or less all right; but by nine or ten months, unless he had been given a few weeks' rest on a technical course, or in hospital, he usually became a drag on the other company officers. After a year to fifteen months he was often worse than useless." (143)

Even still, this timeline was a very generalized observation and not every officer followed the same rate of decline. With personal self-reflection, Robert Graves admits his own afflictions and struggles with Neurasthenia in multiple texts. Additionally, there are several accounts of other persons reaffirming that Graves was either diagnosed with Neurasthenia or, at the very least, they observed him presenting signs that would suggest as much.

NEURASTHENIC GRAVES

After the first-time meeting with Robert Graves, Virginia Woolf took note of her impression of the poet and her thoughts regarding Graves's awkwardness in her 27 April 1925 journal:

> Graves has come to London after six years; can't travel in a train without being sick; is rather proud of his sensibility. No I don't think he'll write great poetry: but what will you? The sensitive are needed to; the halfbaked, stammering stuttering, who perhaps improve their own quarter of Oxfordshire. (Woolf 14)

It is perhaps fortunate that Woolf is a better judge of a person through their writings than she seems to be through personal interaction; either that, or she simply misjudged Graves because she did not understand his present state or choices and the reasoning behind them. In his 1920 article "Retreat from Parnassus," Peter Quenell begins by recalling his father's description of Graves as "rough" but probably a "decent sort of fellow" after their meeting. As for his own impressions, Quenell reserves his impression until his article's conclusion, assessing that Robert Graves:

> […] was as vulnerable as he was easily impressionable, and still exhibited the wounded features of a shell-shocked public schoolboy, who had gone straight from Charterhouse to a line regiment, had been shot through the body on some Flemish battlefield and temporarily left for dead. In common with many survivors of the battle, [Graves] wore the strained and troubled expression of a young man who had lately emerged from an inferno" (qtd. in "Retreat from Parnassus" *Conversations* 6)

But recorded personal interactions with Robert Graves are brief descriptive observations made by civilians who had little firsthand knowledge or understanding of Neurasthenia.

It is in the biographies where Graves's condition is more affirmatively recounted. Martin Seymour-Smith discusses the struggles that Robert Graves lived with throughout his life after World War I, to include "ten years of acute neurasthenia" and a "proneness to return involuntarily to war experience" (*Life and Work* 353, 92). To provide further evidence, Martin Seymour-Smith points out the Author's Note of *Whipperginny* where Graves writes about "'the emotional stress' within him, [which he relates] to 'war neurosis'; and [Graves] states that in the [included] poems there were 'evidences of a

greater detachment', of 'less emotional intensity'" (Seymour-Smith, *Life and Work* 112). In a shorter biographic publication, Seymour-Smith writes that Graves's experiences in World War I: "gave him a sense of isolation and insecurity. It left him with images of pain and horror, which bit deep into his mind. At the same time it left him with a soldier's pride and a soldier's admiration for dour, staunch, disciplined courage" (*Writers & Their Works* 8). Seymour-Smith does an excellent job explaining a paradox that many combat veterans struggle to live with. I understand how the combined emotions of regret, fear, anger, comradery, patriotism, and pride (and so many others) can feel. I also understand how those emotions can be further complicated when trying to assess my own role amongst the violence and chaos of war.

To civilians, the idea of laughing or joking about killing another person before they could kill you first may initially have some small comedic appeal to a few as rhetoric. But when the rhetorical is paired with reality and actual experience, the comedic factor is usually lost. After surviving an environment where every day could potentially be their last, many war-veterans acquire a callousness towards the ideas of life and death. Graves wrote about casualties in his letters which he included within his autobiography. One example demonstrating such ease with death was from 6 June 1915, when Graves wrote of a man who had died during the night:

> … his arm was stretched out stiff […] right across the trench. His comrades joke as they push it out of the way to get by. 'Out of the light, you old bastard! Do you own this bloody trench?' Or else they shake hands with him familiarly. 'Put it there, Billy Boy.' (*GTAT-Red.* 97)

Dark humor often is used by soldiers to cope with the consistent risks and death becomes a source of jokes as a means to take away some of its potency. This attitude and mindset create an invisible societal distance between civilians and veterans. However, Graves points out that there are still some circumstances that extend even beyond the skewed boundaries of what can be found humorous:

> Today, at one part, which is only twenty yards away from an occupied German sap, I went along whistling 'The Farmer's Boy', to keep up my spirits, when suddenly I saw a group bending over a man lying at the bottom of the trench. He was making a snoring noise mixed with animal groans. At my feet lay the cap he had worn, splashed with his brains. I had never seen human brains before; I somehow regarded them as a poetical figment. One can joke with a badly-wounded man and congratulate him on being out of it. One can disregard a dead man. But even a miner can't make a joke that sounds like a joke over a man who takes three hours to die, after the top part of his head has been taken off by a bullet fired at twenty yards' range. (*GTAT-Red.* 98)

As seen in this example, even those experienced with war can still be surprised and dumbfounded. Repeated exposures to such gore and violence only increasingly divide the relatability and empathy between veterans and civilians. As a result, veterans are often othered from civilian society after the glamorized tales of battle and glory are no longer off in some foreign land. After World War I the soldiers returned home, but many brought pieces of the war back with them. Thanks to advances in combat medical procedures such as the tourniquet, survival rates increased in both World Wars, but these also resulted in unprecedented populations of amputees. Wounds were not limited to the

merely physical but also to the psychological. The world's militaries were not just comprised of volunteers who chose the service as the primary career, but also men and women who were teachers, farmers, doctors, and other civilian professions, including the American militaries after the Selective Service Act in 1917 was enacted, allowing for the government to draft citizens to support the war efforts. Civilians that had been working in offices, factories, and schools found themselves thrust into war within a few short months of training and, if they survived until after their wars ended, they came back to their former lives. But to those who had stayed behind, many that returned had changed. Families struggled to imagine their husbands, sons, or fathers being able to kill someone. Some couldn't understand why those who returned couldn't simply move on with their lives as they did before.

Civilians who had never gone to war were not the only ones who struggled with life after war. Veterans found themselves experiencing a sensation of unhomeliness and without resources to help their transition home. They had to learn to readjust to societal standards, laws, and their new daily way of life, with much of the greater populace anticipating their reintegration to be a seamless transition. Some were able to do so, any effects from the war going largely unnoticed or hidden from unknowing viewers. Others were not as fortunate and had to find their own methods of moving past their wartime experiences. Some never did fully return home, with suicide unfortunately offering the most logical answer in their mind to find relief and a means to end their problems.

As Douglas Day explains in *Swifter than Reason,* Graves sought his own methods to readjust to postwar life, writing poetry "which would have a therapeutic value for him—which would allow him to exorcise the turbulent and potentially self-destructive

emotions aroused in him by his wartime experiences" (23). Finding a new purpose, goal, or mission after war is often one of the greatest factors in successfully returning and continuing to survive. There is no one answer for everyone. For some, they find a passion in building with their hands, such as carpentry or auto mechanics. Others devote their lives to furthering their education or a new career field, striving to climb the ranks only to set their sights on the next promotion. I have seen some who saw fully committing to a family life as their saving grace, putting all their time and efforts into their wife and children's happiness. Day argues that for Graves, poetry and writing became his new mission in life, although it was an endeavor which he had begun before, carried through, and continued despite the war.

Even though his works helped with his return, Robert Graves did not return from France as the same man who had left. Miranda Seymour writes in her biography that:

> Graves had shown a division in his personality ever since the war. At home with his children he was kind, affectionate and playful. In the literary world he had become known as a quarrelsome, obstreperous, opinionated man … [who believed] he was always right. (154)

His letters and correspondences became harsh and critical, even threatening at times, with Graves responding to any slight against him with haste and aggression, alienating himself further from other influential peers. But Graves's flaring tempers and hostility were not the only noticeable differences. Perhaps one of the most descriptive accounts of just some of Robert Graves's symptoms is documented in Miranda Seymour's biography:

> [Graves's] mind was haunted by what he had seen. Even the smell of flowers brought back the sickly odour [sic] of poison gas. He cried easily and often. Not

> only did telephones, trains, shrill noises, cause him extreme distress; so, unpredictably, did the presence of strangers… In 1917 and 1918 he hovered on the brink of a nervous breakdown. Recovery took another ten years…. Graves's experiences in 1916 had affected him, physically and emotionally. (60–1)

While something so seemingly trivial and commonplace as a telephone became an ignition point which could set off an episode of shell shock, Frank Kersnowski further confirms Miranda Seymour's account in *The Early Poetry of Robert Graves*. When asking William Graves if he should give his father (Robert Graves) a call before he stopped by for a visit, William laughed and exclaimed that his dad did not own a telephone, suggesting that Kersnowski simply proceed to just go visit him instead (28). Kersnowski continues to explain that he had learned that Robert Graves had "been shocked by a telephone when he was in the trenches in France and still smarted from it" and that Graves "would never completely recover; never again be as innocent as he was before the war" (*Early Poetry* 28). Even Graves accounts for numerous problems from his condition in his autobiography, including experiencing vivid daydreams of his tours in France during his time studying at Oxford, writing that:

> I was still mentally and nervously organized for war. Shells used to come bursting on my bed at midnight … strangers in daytime would assume the faces of friends who had been killed … My disabilities were many: I could not use a telephone, I felt sick every time I travelled by train, and to see more than two new people in a single day it prevented me from sleeping" (*GTAT-Red.* 235–36)[12]

[12] "I was still mentally and nervously organized for war; shells used to come bursting on my bed at midnight … strangers in day-time would assume the faces of friends who had been killed … 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 day it prevented me from sleeping" (*GTAT-1930ed*. 340–41).

Given all of the accounts researched that demonstrate Robert Graves affliction from neurasthenia, the issue presented is to figure out how his condition may have affected his early writing during the war.

DECONSTRUCTING POETRY LIKE LEGGO

Robert Graves is well known for his theories and analyses of poems, including many which faced opposition or are considered controversial. One such example includes his comparison of his "good friend" T. S. Eliot who Graves believes "wrote good poetry" and of Ezra Pound who Graves describes as "the greatest imposter of them all;" someone that he not only does not like, but a person that is "not a poet and hardly a human being" and a "faker" (*Conversations* 34–35). As can be seen in his essays and public addresses, Graves's methods or thoughts on literature constantly were evolving and changing throughout his life. In a 1922 address at Leeds University, Graves gave two of his primary concerns regarding the reading of poetry: "Poetry as it fulfills certain needs in the poet, and Poetry as if fulfils [sic] certain needs in the reader" (*Poetic Unreason* 1). Later in his 1957 essay "Legitimate Criticism of Poetry" he remarks that "few give any thought to the sense of a poem, though it often has layer after layer of meaning concealed in it!" (*On Poetry* 202). Graves continues his essay explaining how he performed a close reading of Milton's *L'Allegro* after his young daughter had presented him with a question regarding the poem. While close reading assumes that a text continues to exist even without a reader, when readers do actively close-read a written work, the interpretation between the text and each individual may differ as the correlations between the textual signifiers do not present an absolute signified but instead produce other signifiers personal to each readers' lives, knowledge, and experiences (i.e. a written text *water* may

be read by one person and they think of a lake, another imagines the ocean, and even another imagines a fish bowl, etc.). These individual interpretive variances are what Derrida calls *différance*. Deconstruction utilizes *différance* to destabilize and demonstrate possibilities beyond common binary understandings, explaining that there are also multiple other possibilities. While it is unknown whether Graves was familiar with either theorist, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault spent years arguing and countering each other and their theories regarding deconstruction (along with other theories) publicly, each with their own emphasis on what is important when reading a text.

But what is *deconstruction*?[13] During a roundtable discussion at Villanova University on 2 October 1994, Derrida tried to summarize the answer as best he could, given the short time limit:

> That is what deconstruction is made of: not the mixture but the tension between memory, fidelity, the preservation of something that has been given to us, and, at the same time, heterogeneity, something absolutely new, and a break. The condition of this performative success, which is never guaranteed, is the alliance of these to newness. (Derrida, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*, edited and translated by Caputo 6)

In his commentary about Derrida's roundtable discussion, John Caputo tries to further explain and simplify:

[13] *Oxford English Dictionary* defines deconstruction as:

a. The action of undoing the construction of a thing.
b. *Philosophy and Literary Theory*. A strategy of critical analysis associated with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), directed towards exposing unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language. ("Deconstruction" *OED.com*).

> The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come. Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away. (31)

However, Carl Leggo argues in his article "Open(Ing) Texts: Deconstruction and Responding to Poetry" that some literary experts claim that the practice of deconstruction cannot be defined and that there is no one definition of what *deconstruction* truly is. Leggo does try to encapsulate how he understands the term as:

> … a practice of reading that aims to make meaning from a text by focusing on how the text works rhetorically, and how a text is connected to other texts as well as the historical, cultural, social, and political contexts in which texts are written, read, published, reviewed, rewarded, and distributed. (187)

This idea echoes Graves's sentiments that "poems must always be judged in their historical context," and that "poems reflect a poet's contemporary world of reference" (*On Poetry* 273, 274). Leggo also describes his method of applying Derrida's theory to poetry, pointing out how every person can potentially deduce their own interpretations from their own morals, education, and experiences and that "readers make meaning as they interact with texts" (187). Given the complexities inherent in poetry, having an outlined application of how to apply deconstruction is beneficial and encouraging. Carl

Leggo further illustrates his best understanding is that "deconstruction objects to interpretive closure. There can be no univocal, authoritative reading or writing of a text. There is always something more" (187). It is with this optimistic consideration that I will apply deconstruction to selections of Graves's war poetry.

In addition to Leggo's theory and to help my own deconstruction process, I will also utilize trauma theory to understand and explain how traumatic events play into Robert Graves's poetry. Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle define this theory as:

> Trauma theory is concerned with ways in which traumatic events are represented in language. It is particularly concerned with the difficulty or impossibility of such representations, particularly in the context of a sense of the unspeakable or untellable and of Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* or deferred action, whereby the trauma may properly be said to be experienced only after it is retrospectively (re)interpreted [sic]. (374)

By including and applying trauma theory, I will be able to better explain how the language of the poems "cross[es] time and place" and demonstrates what Cathy Caruth describes as "'the enigmatic relation' between the event and its aftermath" (Bennett et al. 134). In other words, I will be better equipped to deconstruct the literary selections by also being able to explain how traumatic events continued to affect Graves even after the moment had passed.

In order to successfully deconstruct the poetry of Robert Graves, I will use the suggestions, methods, and practices tailored specifically for deconstructing poetry Leggo

developed in "Open(ing) Texts: Deconstruction and Responding to Poetry."[14/15] This malleable and fluidic literary tool, combined with the assistance of trauma theory, will enable me to bring my own insights and experiences to the war poetry of Robert Graves.

I will deconstruct selections of Robert Graves' war poems, analyzing each poem through multiple levels of focus as circumstance necessitates, such as: 1.) the poem broken word by word; 2.) punctuation, capitalizations, enjambments, and other poetic devices at play within the poem; 3.) the poem broken into phrasings or complete thoughts; 4.) the poem broken into line by line; 5.) the poem broken into sections or stanzas; and 6.) the poem as an entirety.

[14] Dr. Carl Leggo recently passed away 7 March 2019. During his life, he was known as a successful poet, author, and the University of British Columbia's former professor in the Department of Language and Literacy Education. In addition to his fifty-five years as a "teacher/learner," Dr. Leggo was awarded: the 2013 Ted T. Aoki Award for Distinguished Service in Canadian Curriculum Studies; "the 2012 Killam Award for Excellence in Mentoring; the 2001 Sam Black Award for Excellence in Education and Development in the Visual and Performing Arts; [and] the 1995 Killam Teaching Award, Faculty of Education. See: Marlene Lacey's "Lifewriters: Carl Leggo," lifewriting.ca; "Dr. Carl Leggo Biography", University of British Columbia; and "In Memoriam of Dr. Carl Leggo," University of British Columbia for more information.

[15] Dr. Carl Leggo's "Open(ing) Texts: Deconstruction and Responding to Poetry" was published in *Theory into Practice*, Volume 37, Number 3, Summer 1998, and printed by the College of Education at Ohio State University.

Chapter II

BEATING A DEAD BOCHE[16]

"A Dead Boche" by Robert Graves.

To you who'd read my songs of War
  And only hear of blood and fame,
I'll say (you've heard it said before)
  "War's Hell!" and if you doubt the same,
Today I found in Mametz Wood
  A certain cure for lust of blood:

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,
  In a great mess of things unclean,
Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk
  With clothes and face a sodden green,
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
  Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

(Graves, Robert. *War Poems*. Edited by Charles Mundye. Seren, Wales, 2016, p. 108.)

[16] This chapter began as a shorter essay, "Poetry, Shell Shock, and the Hidden Influence: Deconstructing Selections from Robert Von Ranke Graves's *Fairies and Fusiliers,*" which was my first attempt at writing a chapter draft for this thesis during my second semester of Graduate School, Fall 2018.

For this chapter, I will deconstruct Robert Graves's "A Dead Boche", one of his more famous war poems, specifically looking at how Graves writes about the death of an enemy and also watching for any signs of neurasthenia within the poem. This selection has reached popularity in part due to its brevity, accessibility to readers, and almost direct repetition in *Goodbye to All That*. The poem was published in *Goliath and David*, Graves's second published book of poems during his time in the war. Many critics have attacked this poem for various reasons, most expressing their consideration of the work to not be good poetry. Nicholas Carter even argues that "A Dead Boche" further proves Siegfried Sassoon's written appraisal of Graves's war poetry in *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston* (386): "[Graves] distrusted sublimination and seemed to want the War to be even uglier than it really was. His mind loathed and yet attached itself to the rank smells and squalid details" (qtd. in Carter 88). Sassoon may have also been a veteran of World War I, but just as every person is different, the same can also be said for every veteran. We have different experiences, different thoughts, different motivation, and we process our thoughts and emotions and events in our own ways.

Douglas Day's thoughts on "A Dead Boche" are often quoted or referenced in academic discussions. Despite its consideration as a seminal critique, it is my opinion that his thoughts on the poem provide a great example of the disconnect between veteran and civilian mentalities. Day was very critical of this poem, even more so than others, but the gist of Day's opinion is that "the description is terse and precise, and we are properly shocked by it, but the poem is still not a good one, for a number of reasons" (*Swifter than Reason* 12–13)[17]. In response, to Day, I defer to James Campbell's explanation:

[17] Douglas Day's critique of "A Dead Boche":

> Perhaps the single most important defining element of the genre is this emphasis on personal experience. The trench lyric is written from the point of view of a direct observer, and its legitimacy depends upon the putative accuracy of its representation of its writer's experience in the trench. Therein lies its realism, the hallmark of the trench lyric and its criticism. (205)

There is much to Day's critique which could easily be argued for, but Day has never lived through a similar experience and is trying to force his ideas of what constitutes good poetry as defined by civilian poets.

Nicholas Carter gives Graves much more credit and consideration. He points out the "two abiding Gravesian concerns" where "the first is with the brute facts and imperatives of physical existence … by which [Graves] was both fascinated and repelled and yet unable … to let alone…" (87). This would help to explain the gory scenic details within "A Dead Boche" because Graves was simply writing what he had seen. That was part of his style and method at the time. During an interview with Peter Buckman and William Fifield, Graves was asked why he had not written trench poetry like other war poets. Robert Graves responded simply, "I did. But I destroyed them. They were journalistic" ("Art of Poetry XI" *Conversations* 97). He was able to admit that he had written poems that were not to his standard and, because he did not like them, he would rather destroy them instead of sending them to press. Graves later expressed that "when

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The description is terse and precise, and we are properly shocked by it, but the poem is still not a good one, for a number of reasons. For one thing, the sole emotion expressed by the poet and consequently aroused in the reader is one of disgust: the dead soldier is seen not as a person, but merely as an object-lesson in the filthiness of war's leavings. We are invited not to feel pity for him, not to see, that is, behind the horrid details in the foreground, but only to be repelled by the extreme ugliness of the scene. There is something fundamentally wrong with a poem that aims at nothing more than an excitation of loathing, that does not attempt to go beyond disgust to some sort of sympathetic understanding of the object, and "A Dead Boche" fails because it does not do this. (Day, *Swifter than Reason* 12–13).

the Armistice came and came to stay, poetry of military conflict immediately lost its purpose," so it seems that, at least in his mind, there was no reason to continue writing poems of that nature (*Poetic Unreason* 20). Graves is well documented for his criticism and repeated edits and revisions of his work. During a conversation with Edwin Newman, Graves stated that "If I write a poem and feel dissatisfied with it—which I almost always am—I rewrite it anything from five to thirty-five times. Twelve is a good average" (qtd. in "Speaking Freely" *Conversations* 114). Carter continues, saying that "Graves's second abiding concern is with time, with history as a meaningless cycle of phenomenal events bereft of the noumenal" (88). In his own words, Graves writes that "reader[s] must be made to surrender [themselves] completely to the poet […]; [they] must never be allowed to run ahead and say 'Hurry up, sir, I know this part of the country as well as you'" (*On English Poetry* 91). I find time within "A Dead Boche" as a concept that creeps and crawls as the scenery slowly unravels line by line, forcing me to slow down and take note of images that may otherwise be ignored or glanced over quickly from disgust. But as a veteran, I also find the poem to be almost cathartic with its blunt, unabashed language, a poetic relief written for peers of understanding rather than being written for average consumers.

The poem begins with "To you who'd read my songs of War" (Line 1). This first line is an open letter to anyone who would desire to read the words, civilian and veteran, young and old, friend or foe, all are welcome. Even the choice to end the line with a comma resembles a letter's salutational first line, similar to writing 'To My Dearest Friend,' before proceeding into the body of the correspondence. The poem cordially greets its readers, and the intended recipients are only limited by those who do not read

the poems. Robert Graves wrote that "in Poetry [sic] the implication is more important than the manifest statement; the underlying associations with every word are marshalled carefully" (*On English Poetry* 14). I believe the decision to include the contraction *who'd* serves multiple purpose. The first being that formality is paired with familiarity, foregoing the unnecessary verbiage which may expected for more official addressees. The second purpose I believe is to create an interpretive ambiguity and separate the intended audience into two different categories. After all, Graves argues that "most wise poets intend their work only for those who speak the same language as themselves […] and who, if they don't perhaps understand all the allusions in the poem, will know at any rate where to go to look them up in a work of reference" (*On English Poetry* 42). Diction plays a large key to the interpretation of the words *who'd read*, with the latter determining the former. If the word *read* is understood phonologically to sound as rēd (/ɹiːd/), then *who'd* expands to *who would*, therefore addressing two potential audiences: those who are reading the poems for the first time and those who have decided to revisit them. If the word *read* is understood to sound as rĕd (/ɹɛd/), then *who'd* would expand to *who had*, thereby changing the audience to only those who had returned to rereading the poems, now excluding any newcomers, but offering a warm welcoming or remembrance of friends, comrades, or people the narrator is familiar with. The argument may be made that the verb *hear* in the next line should mandate that *who'd read* in line one must be active in a present tense; however, as with variances which *différance* explains, the signifier *hear* to me creates a new signifier as a stand-in for *to contemplate* or *to imagine*, which I would further interpret as a continued act of understanding or (re)imagining even after the initial reading. During my time in the military, it was not uncommon for

instructions to be given to a formation followed by a question of confirmation of "You hear?" to which the response for understanding was a unified "We hear!"[18] My main point regarding this distinction is that the military does not want the past tense of *understood*; they want a persistent and active present tense of continuous understanding. Also, considering Graves's gratitude for words and their deeper meanings, I believe the decision to use the word *read* as opposed to another synonym, regardless of intended or interpreted tense, means more than just the act of translating the letters of his poems in vocal or mental sounds. Aside from just meaning "to peruse," the *Oxford English Dictionary* has other, more complex meanings for the word *read* which Graves may have been playing on:

> (I) to consider, interpret, discern; (I.2.B) to make out, discover, or expound the meaning or significance of (a riddle, dream, omen, etc.); (II.5.C) to follow, interpret, or be able to interpret (musical notation); spec. to sight-read (music); (II.7.C) to study, observe, or interpret (a phenomenon, an object) as though by reading. Now spec.: to analyze or interpret (any cultural product, as a film, ritual, etc.) using methodology analogous to literary criticism or interpretation; (II.7.C) To assess precisely any indications or clues given out by (a location, situation, etc.) in order to decide on a course of action; (II.9.A) to attach a certain meaning or interpretation to (a text); to take in a particular way; (II.9.B) in extended use: to take a particular view of (a person, thing, event, etc.); to regard or interpret in a certain way; (III) to learn through reading or examination. ("Read" *OED.com*)

[18] Alternatively, the question of confirmation would be "Tracking?" which inherits a unified responsive of "Tracking!" It is the same meaning, just different jargon.

I would argue that the word provides multiple interpretations for readers because of these expanded meanings. With his education in Latin, classical literatures, and recorded instances of his essays extensively focused on words and his complaints with lacks in original meanings, Graves had the knowledge to play with his verbiage effectively. Readers should give his poems thoughtful considerations, taking their time to analyze every aspect of his works and learn.

Line one also draws attention to the relation between poetry and music. As with tradition in classical war accounts like Virgil's lyrical *Aeneid*, Graves refers to his war poetry not as *poems*, but instead addresses them as *songs*. While this may not be uncommon of lyric poems, the idea of songs coming from a war setting provides an expectation of patriotism that juxtaposes with Graves's uncanny and journalistic style. In the case of "A Dead Boche", Graves has written an unconventionally graphic poem, but he does so in a formulaic sexain[19] of iambic tetrameter, a rhythmic, metered pattern like a watch, or heartbeat. To translate the poem into musical format, with the poetic beats transcribed into musical notes, the time signature (sometimes referred to as a meter signature) would be C (common time), also understood to mean $\frac{4}{4}$ (4/4). Put plainly, this means there are four beats per measure, quarter notes represent each beat. If each line of "A Dead Boche" were to be considered as a musical measure, then each foot would represent each quarter note, therefore translating each syllable to represent eighth notes.

[19] According to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*:
Sexain is may also be named "sixain, sextain, sextet, sestet, hexastich" and is defined as "names variously and indiscriminately applied to the great variety of 6-line [six-line] stanzas in Western poetry." *Sestet* is "restricted to the concluding 6 [six] lines of a sonnet" with the remaining terms being "applied interchangeably." Common sexains include: "(1) ababcc, in iambic pentameter (the so-called *Venus and Adonis* stanza); (2) ababcc, in iambic tetrameter (…a familiar stanzaic form in German lyric poetry); (3) tail-rhyme, $aa^4b^3cc^4b^3$; (4) Burns stanza, $aaa^4b^2a^4b^2$; [and] (5) xayaza. ("Sexain." *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by Alex Preminger, 1965, Enlarged ed., Princeton UP, 1974, pp. 764).

To simplify: eight syllables per line, eight eighth note beats per measure; four feet per line, four quarter note beats per measure; twelve lines divided into two stanzas of six lines each, twelve measures divided into two stanzas of six lines each. I believe the decision by Robert Graves to have written "A Dead Boche" in a traditional German lyrical sexainic form was entirely intentional given his extensive academic upbringing and his Germanic heritage from his mother's side.

While songs may often be paired with happy connotations, there are also songs of remorse and grieving, songs of recompense, songs of praise, and of almost every human emotion, which give Graves's works a juxtaposition to what may be anticipated from the word choice. Songs, whether whistled or sung, were a topic that Graves mentions specifically and on multiple occasions in his autobiography *Goodbye to All That*. One such instance that Graves remembers and shares is a march to Cambrin in 1915, in which he takes care to differentiate in his recollection the comical songs that were sung by his own unit, the songs that he got stuck in his own head for a full week, and finally the "defeatist" songs sung by the Second Welsh Battalion[20] that included the lines "I want to go home, I want to go home" (*GTAT-Red.* 125–26). Another time Graves expresses the importance of song during the war was in the camp at the Somme during the spring of 1916 with all of the A company officers joining together to "chant church anthems and bits of cantata whenever things were going well," although the revised edition omits the occasion (*GTAT-1930ed*. 235).

[20] Not to be confused with the Second Welch Battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. The two regiment were separate units until 2006 when Welsh Regiment was combined with the Royal Welch Regiment to form what is now known as The Royal Regiment of Wales. I had the pleasure of working with members of the unit in late 2005 for joint force training exercises while I was stationed in RAF Mildenhall, UK. They were a very proud and professional group of soldiers that were more than happy to share the history of the two units which combined sometime early the following spring after I had deployed.

Even today, music is a constant moral boost during war and for different reasons. Songs can help to lighten a serious or depressing mood. They can offer a mental connection with home, friends, family, and other loved ones even with thousands of miles separation. Strangers can find comradery through shared interests in music and songs can help pass the time. Even while I was performing convoys in Iraq, our down time off the road usually involved a constant rotation of amateur musicians with their guitars playing for the small rotating groups of smokers who would spend hours hanging out and singing to escape all other realities if only for a short while. While we were on the road, in almost every truck (which do not have stereo radio systems), each team had devised some means of a radio system to listen to music with either to rewired external computer speakers or from materials such as ammo cans, coolers, and makeshift boxes connected to portable music devices like iPods, Walkman players, or AM/FM receivers. For us, music was a crucial part of our day-to-day life during our deployments.

With limited joys in the theatre of World War I, song was a simple yet powerful tool for many, and among that many, Graves must also reside. In *Goodbye to All That*, Graves recounts a time his group were sorting through the bodies after a gas attack, merrily singing as he went from enemy to enemy, and stabbing them with his bayonet. Graves recalls that "The men laughed at my singing. The acting C.S.M. [Command Sergeant Major] said: 'It's murder, sir.' 'Of course it's murder, you bloody fool' I agreed. 'But there's nothing else for it, is there?'" (*GTAT-Red.* 137). To many, the casualness of the scenario may seem horrific or appalling, but as I said, music can you help get through hard times.

The word *War* can be capitalized for numerous reasons, whether out of respect, fear, or personification. To better explain the personification, the first line may be using *War* in the biblical sense as in Revelations of the Christian Bible, representing one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse: Pestilence, Famine, Death, and War. If that is the case, then it could be a play on the religious concerns of the time that the Great War was possibly the end of times, maybe even a further joke on the popular saying that World War I would be *the war to end all wars*. However, Graves did not hold much faith in religion after his time in France. In *Goodbye to All That* he explains that "hardly one soldier in a hundred was inspired by religious feeling of even the crudest kind. It would have been difficult to remain religious in the trenches*" (GTAT-Red.* 157)[21]. Then again, one of the simplest explanations is that Graves was specifically referring to his *songs* of World War I and simply shortening the title.

The second line continues as an enjambment of the first: "And only hear of blood and fame," (Line 2). It is doubtful that some of the same annoyances of contemporary veterans did not also occur during World War I. The self-imposed feeling of being *othered* from civilians at home is a recurring theme among veterans of every war within the past century. The soldiers of war seem to lose their individuality and humanity within civilian societies. Instead, the returning soldier becomes more of a metaphorical symbol filling a role, a faceless body in a uniform, rather than a person trying to find their place outside of the combat theatre. Few civilians thought of the continuous battles as a personal concern until someone close in their life was injured or killed or the war expanded to their front door. In my experience, especially the longer a conflict continues,

[21] "Religion. It was said that not one soldier in a hundred was inspired by religious feeling of even the crudest kin. It would have been difficult to remain religious in the trenches…" (*GTAT-1930ed*. 230).

the subject of war eventually loses the initial invested interests and is soon discussed as casually and with as much detachment as the daily weather or a local sporting event. Even the casualties became no more than faceless numbers and embroidered gold stars.

Graves captured his own feelings of *othering* in his autobiography. While recovering from his injuries in 1916, he noted that:

> England looked strange to us returned soldiers. We could not understand the war-madness that ran wild everywhere, looking for a pseudo-military outlet. The civilians talked a foreign language; and it was a newspaper language. I found serious conversation with my parents all but impossible. (*GTAT-Red.* 188)[22]

The pleasantries of casual or even enlightening or academic conversation were no longer present. Instead, the conversations involved uninformed people glossing over the realities and ugliness of war, trying to maintain or regurgitate the war propaganda they were being given to continue national support. I often wonder if there were some civilians who thought it was important to share that they were *going* to enlist, but either could not or had not for this reason or another, even though those individuals had may have held every intention to avoid being personally involved with the war or the risks involved. It is a conversation I found myself awkwardly cornered into on multiple occasions during my time in the service when I would be in uniform off-base. I found that with each similar encounter, it was increasingly difficult to restrain my frustration with the person and maintain my military bearing and professionalism. I came to the (hypothetical) conclusion during my research that I don't believe Robert Graves would have been the

[22] England was strange to the returned soldier. He could not understand the war-madness that ran about everywhere looking for a pseudo-military outlet. Everyone talked a foreign language; it was newspaper language. I found serious conversation with my parents all but impossible. (*GTAT-1930ed*. 271).

type of person to hold his tongue. Then again, that may be just me reflecting how I wanted to respond to someone I can't ask in person.

One thing has not changed throughout history: war is not generally considered a thing of *fame* for average servicemembers, though Graves gave a half-truth expressing that it is one of *blood*. War is a grotesque necessity in response to tyranny, and an immersion into and acceptance of becoming an *other* for all involved from home and most of the world. Until physically and personally experienced, war and the acts required for victory and survival (of oneself and of others) remain indescribable. Yet it is not uncommon for those who have been to war to feel more comfortable in that setting, some even wishing to return. Graves even commented that, after spending his time recovering in 1916 and witnessing how life was changing away from the frontlines that, "once more [he] was glad to be sent up to the trenches" (*GTAT-Red.* 196). I have felt this way from time to time and many of my friends have told me they too shared the sentiment.

It's hard to explain, but life seems to become simpler in-theatre. I cannot tell you exactly when I began to feel that way and I have no idea if I could think of any specific reasons. As time passes, the other grunts become your friends and eventually feel like family. You find a place of belonging and purpose even in the worst possible conditions and locations. Studying the soldiers of World War I, Kardiner and Spiegel theorized that:

> Loneliness is one of the most demoralizing factors in the army. It is usually most apparent in the replacement men. An individual coming into a new group as a replacement is expected to function properly before he has had time to develop personal attachments to the people around him. Such a man lacks the support which proper relatedness to the fighting group would give him. He is therefore

> isolated and demoralized. No soldier wants to leave the outfit to which he has become attached. […] The whole problem of adjustment to army life and group morale is often abruptly terminated by a wound. (43, 40)

I would have to agree with this stance. Fourteen years after my tour in Iraq, I stay in contact with my convoy team thanks to social media. We celebrate each other's victories and accomplishments; we offer advice when we hit hard times; and we try to stay in each other's lives regardless of the distances of separation. For other military members that I meet, the ease and level of comradery is always better if they have deployed or have been in locations or situations. The shared experiences help to provide mutual understandings that I have not found with civilian encounters.

Where you fit into the social hierarchy is easily understood thanks to rank designations and operational positions. Since retiring, I have found it difficult at times to figure out where I fit in the civilian world. In a place of work, it is easier because the structure is similar to the military, but there is a large distinction between the two realms. In the military, the role of servicemembers does not change just because they take off their uniform. A sergeant in uniform in the field is still a sergeant at the grocery store in civvies (civilian attire). For the U.S. military, the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) applies to every person in the service across the board twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year (even three hundred sixty-six on leap years). Unlike civilian law, the UCMJ provides guidance in black and white for nearly every situation imaginable. To further provide stability, every branch also has its own regulations, such as Army Regulations or Air Force Instructions (AFI's). This doesn't even include smaller regulations from each level of command in addition to other

federal, state, and local government departments' regulations. Robert Graves became very familiar with this type of military law as he presided over numerous military trials and hearings as one of his officer responsibilities. In multiple sections of his autobiography, he recounts numerous cases, some which I found to be quite superfluously humorous. So many rules to follow might seem overwhelming, but I found the structure reassuring.

Regarding the choice to use the word *fame*, few who have achieved such distinction have done so without significant sacrifices, sometimes including permanent disfigurement or death. I don't believe any servicemember in their right mind wants to find fame in war; that is, at least not the ones actually doing the fighting. In fact, Kardiner and Spiegel report that:

> One of the happiest sights in the army is a group of newly wounded soldiers. It's all over for them. No more conflict. At least that is the immediate reaction. A wound which doesn't kill is a soldier's best guarantee of survival. At the moment, survival at the cost of a limb is a cheap price to pay. (40)

But despite these risks and the multitudes of the injured returning to their homes, there are still those who believe there are glories to be found in battle. They seek out war-stories as though they were fairy tales of great heroics and grand adventures. They love the tales that they can disassociate from reality, as if the narratives did not happen to real people with families or with lives or that hold actual consequences. The popularity and success of Hollywood war films, televised documentaries, novels, and even cartoons like *G.I. Joe* demonstrate that such a demographic exists, and they are not a small minority. I

guess it is always easiest to enjoy such violence when the reality is kept in the realm of fiction and imagination.

The third line of the poem is best presented with part of the fourth to allow for a complete stream of thought: "I'll say (you've heard it said before) / 'War's Hell!'" (Lines 3–4). Line three reaffirms the validity of the adage on war, one many are familiar with at least in words. If you omit the interjection and line break, the poem demonstrates a personal agreement in its truth. The poem convinces me that the speaker knows firsthand how true the saying is and that the matter should be taken seriously. Graves did not write that *some say* or *that it is said*, he chose to use the phrase "*I'll say* 'War's Hell!'" (Lines 3–4; emphasis added)[23]. The poem takes an active stance against the assumptions and bewilderments discussed from line two. War stories are often told with romanticized half-truths which withhold the true extent of violence and bloodshed. I interpret this line as if the speaker is publicly challenging anyone to refute his truth and authority to comment in the matter. As previously stated, some poets believe that Graves's work was not good poetry. Even Siegfried Sassoon, a friend and fellow soldier to Graves, told him that "war should not be written about in such a realistic way" (*GTAT-Red.* 146). But again, following what Carter describes as his *Gravesian truths*, Robert Graves did not stop publishing what he had lived through.

The remainder of line four works well with line five, reinforcing the preceding point before proceeding to give an example of his truth in the following line: "and if you doubt the same, / To-day I found in Mametz Wood" (Lines 4–5). The poem concludes the

[23] Italics added by me to signify the point of focus for the discussion.

fourth line like an acknowledgement that a singular voice can be silenced or discredited, but the speaker dares readers to dismiss the truth of the poem's intimate testimony.

To-day can be examined for a couple of reasons. While the hyphenated spelling may have been common during the early 1900s, I still wanted to consider other possibilities. *Today* can be simply stating what day the poem refers to while writing the poem. The hyphen may be another way of saying the early morning, such as dawn, or as though going to daylight from night, dusk. Such a possibility is even more compelling when realizing Graves' night missions in the trenches were his introduction to death and the casualties of war in France, where a friendly (allied) machine gunner had committed suicide. The machine gunner was facedown when Graves tried to get his attention. He shook the man and "noticed suddenly the hole in the back of his head. He had taken off the boot and sock to pull the trigger of his rifle with one toe, the muzzle was in his mouth" (*GTAT-Red.* 89)[24]. The tensions of night-watch and the unknown dangers concealed in the darkness can stress any experienced soldier. Shadows play tricks on the mind. Clumps of grass, larger rocks, and even the trees seem to move. The imagination creates invisible threats on the edges of vision, as if turning your head quickly enough would allow you to catch a momentary sight of a conjured ghost before it dissipates into darkness. Soldiers on guard must maintain the highest level of vigilance, their exertions quickly resulting in fatigue, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

While I would never directly compare the trenches of France with the roads of Iraq, I believe there are some similarities to consider. During my tour in Iraq, we conducted the majority of our convoys primarily at night with only a few extenuating

[24] "noticed suddenly that the back of his head was blown out…He had taken off his boot and sock to pull the trigger with his toe; the muzzle was in his mouth" (*GTAT-1930ed.* 130–31)

exceptions requiring daylight operations. To better understand the scale of these missions, I should first generally explain how these convoys were comprised. Most line-haul convoy units were stationed in Kuwait as their home base of operations. This helped to facilitate a single, primary destination outside of the RedZone (area of combat) for the deployment and effective redistribution of cargo to any designated point within the operational theatre from one singular location. My own convoy team was made up of eighteen airmen[25] typically operated around seven up-armored Freightliner M915's, six of which were attached to forty-foot tri-axle flatbed trailers which transported various cargoes from base to base throughout Kuwait and Iraq. A few months into our rotation, the Air Force gun truck mission in Kuwait was retaken by the Army. Since I was already friends with the mechanic in our convoy team from our 2005 deployment, I volunteered for the assignment of the Maintenance Bobtail left-seat operator and Tiffany 'Sic-Chic' took right-seat as navigator and primary communications. In addition to military vehicles (referred to as Greens) and personnel, usually between thirty to sixty unarmed civilian contractors would join our team, each driving their own tractor-trailer (which were referred to as Whites, primarily because that was the color of most contractor semis). At some point before crossing the border into Iraq, three to five High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV, commonly referred to as Humvee) gun trucks would join the line, filing positions at regular intervals within the tractor-trailers. The lead vehicle was always a Green, and they were responsible for navigating the entire group from one

[25] The designation of *Airman* is a shared generalized term for encompassing all servicemembers in the United States Air Force. When used in this capacity, the term does not differentiate gender, rank, or position. Airman (singular) / Airmen (plural). *Airman* can also be applied to the first four enlisted ranks: E1, Airman Basic (AB); E2, Airman (AMN); E3, Airman First Class (A1C); and E4, Senior Airman (SrA). Again, there are not differentiations based on gender.

location to the next and that vehicle was most often followed by the first gun truck. The other Greens would fill in among the Whites as decided during the pre-op briefings, providing the most efficient means of coverage and security to the unarmed civilian-drivers. As the only Maintenance Bobtail for the entire convoy, my truck position was always fluid, often requiring us to drive beside the convoy line performing periodic visual checks of all the vehicles while we continued to move down the road. Once all the vehicles were through the base gates and on the MSR's, the number of vehicles for a line-haul mission could be anywhere between forty to seventy-five in all, accounting for an estimated distance ranging from 2600ft up to 4900ft. Factoring in the interval distances between each vehicle, it was not uncommon for entire convoys to extend well over a mile from the front-bumper of the first vehicle to back-bumper of the last. Traveling at highway speed, it is difficult to scan the changing surroundings for dangers. My eyes and focus would constantly be switching back and forth from the vehicle in front of us, anything on or near the road, and trying to see as far up and down the line as possible. Complacency was something that could result in catastrophe. In the event of an attack, the primary goal was to keep the convoy moving and evade the contact zone, which could be at any point in the line. The gun trucks would respond according with the mounted weapons and the Greens would also return fire. If one or more vehicles were damaged but could continue driving, then we would continue a predetermined distance after the initial attack before stopping to make what critical repairs were possible to get make the vehicles operational. That was also when any injuries could be treated by our medic. Until then, each person relied on the other person in their truck for any necessary lifesaving measures. If one or more vehicles were incapacitated during an attack, it was

the Maintenance Bobtail crew's responsibility to get those vehicles moving again by any means necessary. Most often, that meant exiting the truck to hook up the tow bar and pulling the vehicle to safety. This all was further complicated since we operated at night and visibility was often limited to the headlights and spotlights on our vehicles. The goal was for everyone to reach the next location safely and successfully deliver the cargo. My team was fortunate not to lose anyone, though other detachments and teams were not all as lucky. The constant state of hypervigilance and the anticipation of being attacked at any moment was exhausting and, as I have stated earlier, I still have not been able to stop the habit over a decade later.

I can somewhat empathize and imagine how soldiers experienced night-watch in the trenches of World War I, combining multiple occasions of when I was responsible for nighttime perimeter security during field exercises with the feelings of imminent danger I experience in real-world combat operations. However, I also acknowledge that I would still lack true understanding of what those soldiers witnessed in the trenches since my own experiences in war were very different. But I think the same level of variations can apply to every theatre of combat for every war.

Even if different wars or conflicts occur in the same geographical locations, the changes of time can create entirely different environments. In the time of Robert Graves, this can be observed with both world wars. World War I introduced new technologies of fighting slowly but steadily, with aviation, armored units (such as tanks, artillery, and the like), naval ships, and many other weapons still in their infancy or early stages of development. By World War II, those technologies had vastly changed and the rate of advancements exponentially. Where WWI 's aviation consisted of observation balloons,

small aeroplanes like the Fokkers, Sopwiths, and SPADS, and early bombers, WWII produced larger, faster, and deadlier aircraft, many that still are considered aviation marvels, such as the P-38 Lightning, B-29 Superfortress, P-51 Mustang, Japanese Zeroes, and British Spitfires. WWII also began the introduction of turbine engine jet aircraft. Armored units had become common and were more powerful and maneuverable. Naval ships introduced seafaring dreadnaughts including massive battleships, cruisers, frigates, advanced submersibles and aircraft-carriers. Almost every instrument of death had evolved between the two conflicts. Even though both world wars shared common locations throughout Germany and much of Europe, little else remained the same. In my own life, similar changes can be observed when comparing Desert Storm of the 1990s and the War in Iraq that began in 2003.

Returning to my analysis of the poem, I have considered another possibility for the word *Today* could be that Graves is referring to *two days* as opposed to a singular day. If this is a play on the homophonic qualities, then the word could be in reference to Graves's retelling in *Goodbye to all That* where the paragraph that mirrors the events within this poem begin with the phrase "The next two days" rather than everything happening in such a short span of time (*GTAT-Red.* 175)

Mametz Wood was one of the worst operations that Robert Graves was involved with and one that he retells vividly within this poem and in greater detail in his autobiography. But, as can be speculated from line six, he may have known how some back home would think of the retelling of events.

Line six, "A certain cure for lust of blood:" may again be a reference to those who talk about war without ever being in danger of going to war, or a metaphorical thirst or

desire driving each side to continue fighting rather than to concede. One other possibility would be that the poem may be speaking to citizens who are considering enlisting, providing harsh truths either to prepare them for what is to come or to warn them against joining under false expectations. I do not think that the intended demographic was meant to include the veteran patriots as Graves himself expressed that "Patriotism, in the trenches, was too remote a sentiment, and at once rejected as fit only for civilians, and prisoners" (*GTAT-Red.* 157)[26]. The diction and word choice cause me to ponder as well. The speaker did not just find *a* cure or *the* cure, but a *certain* cure, which may mean that he is positive of the effectiveness of his *certain cure*. It may be of another connotation as to mean *peculiar* or possibly a type that is not usually spoken of in public, more of a negative context of the word when used to maintain proper appearances in certain company, such as when trying to speak of a certain someone that only the recipient of the conversation would know the identity of. The choice to use the word *lust* rather than *love* is also deliberate. *Lust* is a desire to find fulfillment of passion, possibly even through violence if required, and seeking to gorge oneself until satisfied. The first stanza ends with a colon, like an introduction preparing to set a theatrical scene. The first verse of this song concludes before the next verse begins.

Where the first stanza of "A Dead Boche" was more of an active address to the living, the second stanza exists more as a passive memory of the dead, with the space between stanzas acting as a poetic format of separation as well as a symbolic one. Line seven, "Where, propped against a shattered trunk," can be read in a journalistic manner much as Graves had reported of his other war poems that he destroyed (Line 7). *Where,*

[26] "There was no patriotism in the trenches. It was too remote a sentiment, and rejected as fit only for civilians" (*GTAT-1930ed*. 229).

presenting the prompt or question and the following providing the response. But the verbiage of the response creates an unnatural hesitation. *Propped* is rarely a word that signifies a state of alertness, but it is often used to describe a casual mood and posture that contrast with the tense expectations of war. When I imagine a person *propped against a tree*, I picture a person without a care in the world at that moment, sleeping or daydreaming with their legs outstretched and sitting with their backs against the base of the trunk. In such a disturbing setting as Mametz Wood, this relaxed mental imagery binarily opposes the expected notion of a soldier in the trenches of France, his nerves frayed, always at the ready. But *propped* does not always refer to how a person situates themselves. If something is *propped* against a tree by someone else, the action is often done with attention to care and in a purposeful manner, like standing a wet umbrella in a corner behind the entrance doorway. Though the poem has not specified the thing as a person, scanning ahead to line nine quickly confirms as much. Not only is the object a person, but that person is a corpse. Just as the trunk of the tree has been shattered, so too have the hopes and dreams of the dead man.

Line eight continues the journalistic description of the scene: "In a great mess of things unclean," (Line 8). The word *unclean* may be taken to mean the literal definition, as in filth or dirty, or the poem may be referring to the more implied connotations of the sins of war that were committed during the battle. The description is worded carefully. As I read this line, I feel as though the speaker of the poem is struggling between two different identities, the person he was before the war and the person he is becoming. The first attempts to maintain a British propriety and formality of avoiding over-exaggerations. The second is the battle-hardened *other* that has adopted a casualness to

death and violence, therefore choosing to utilize an equally casual term such as *mess* to replace what others may as well describe as *gore*. To give an allegorical inflection, the term *mess* is also traditional military jargon still in use today to refer to the dining hall, a sly and subtle gesture to the adage of *it's a dog-eat-dog world*. Only in this poetic depiction, the soldiers are the animals.

The scene develops further: "Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk" (Line 9). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a "Boche" is a colloquial term of French origin used during both World Wars meaning "German" or "German soldier" but that is also "chiefly derogatory and potentially offensive" ("Boche" *OED.com*). The use of alliteration in this line may be a further insult to the German soldier, mocking the enemy corpse with contempt. It is as if the repetitive hissing sound of the *S* is a poetic device to subtlety assign serpent-like attributes to the enemy soldier, much as how the biblical serpent in the Garden of Eden represents the original sin, the poem is blaming the Germans for the sins of war. The description of the corpse is intentionally putrid and grotesque. The stench from a decomposing body is difficult to forget. For Robert Graves, the reference to smell is a powerful connection to his own personal troubles. In his own assessment, Graves wrote that "since 1916, the fear of gas obsessed me: any unusual smell, even a sudden strong scent of flowers in a garden, was enough to send me trembling" (GTAT-Red. 220). As recorded by numerous writers, unpleasant odors would send Graves into intense shell-shock episodes. As Martin Seymour-Smith explains, Robert Graves "should have been in Craiglockhart himself; his nerves were in pieces, strange smells put him into trembling sweats, and any bang sent him flying for cover"

(*Robert Graves: His Life and Work* 59)[27]. John Presley explains that Craiglockhart was "the British military's most well-known facility for treating shell-shock" that had been "set up for dealing with increased numbers of psychological casualties after the Somme" (275–275). Graves had already begun to develop increasingly negative reactions associated with smell during his time in France. He had experienced his first gas attack shortly after his initial arrival in-country, and he shares that revulsion in the next three lines: "With clothes and face a sodden green, / Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired, / Dribbling black blood from nose and beard." (Lines 10–12).

Although *Goodbye to All That* was written over a decade after "A Dead Boche," many of the words in the second stanza are echoed almost verbatim, though lacking the poetic form, in his autobiography as Robert Graves illustrates the aftermath from the Battle of Mametz Wood:

> Going and Coming, by the only possible route, I passed by the bloated and stinking corpse of a German with his back propped against a tree. He had a green face, spectacles, close-shaven hair; black blood was dripping from the nose and beard. (*GTAT-Red.* 175)[28]

This could be for various reason. It may be that, given the journalistic quality of the poem, Graves was able to use his poem much like a reference source. Perhaps the scene was so burned into Graves's memory that he could only remember the scene as he describes, the memory replaying in his mind, haunting him for years. Then again, maybe

[27] Craiglockhart was the facility where Siegfried Sassoon and many others were sent due to psychological breaks during war for recovery and treatment.

[28] "Going and coming, by the only possible route, I had to pass by the corpse of a German with his back propped against a tree. He had a green face, spectacles, close shaven hair; black blood was dripping from the nose and beard. He had been there for some days and was bloated and stinking" (*GTAT-1930ed*. 253).

he was merely continuing to be poetic with *Goodbye to All That*. Whatever the reason, this was not the first time Graves witnessed the progressive rot of another man's body.

Prior to Mametz Wood, Graves had been entrenched at Maison Rouge Alley, a place he describes as much like a nightmare, Graves recalls the casualties in his autobiography:

> After the first day or two the corpses swelled and stank. I vomited more than once while superintending the carrying [of the bodies]. Those we could not get in from the German wire continued to swell until the wall of their stomach collapsed, either naturally or when punctured by a bullet; a disgusting smell would float across. The colour [sic] of the dead faces changed from white to yellow-grey, to red, to purple, to green, to black, to slimy. (*GTAT-Red. 137*)[29]

Graves had become familiar not only with death, but also with the decay and rot of the deceased. He had a general understanding of the rate at which a body decomposed. Moreover, it is widely understood that every person bleeds red, but many soldiers know firsthand that blood is not always the same shade of red. The variations in color depend on variables such as freshness in respect to how long the person has been deceased and locational origin, i.e. a vein, arterial bleed, or internal injury.

The final line may be an acknowledgement of those physics, or it may in fact be a trope used to dehumanize the enemy soldier, quite possibly to help the speaker as well as his readers, to bear the weight of war and death. Charles Mundye argues that:

[29] "After the first day or two the bodies swelled and stank. I vomited more than once while superintending the carry [of the bodies]. The ones we could not get in from the German wire continued to swell until the wall of their stomach collapsed, either naturally or punctured by a bullet; a disgusting smell would float across. The colour of the dead faces changed from white to yellow-grey, to red, to purple, to green, to black, then slimy" (*GTAT-1930ed*. 199–200).

> …in the poem, there is a reverse transformation from death into macabre life, making the paradoxes of war all the more immediately vivid. The metamorphosis of the dead corpse into grotesque material life comes through his active presence: he sits, he scowls, he stinks, he dribbles." (*War Poems* 24)

With this consideration, the Boche is almost zombie-like, being dead while showing attributions of the living. The poem takes its time to illustrate the changes of human decay in graphic detail, his utilization of commas creates slight, momentary pauses for each distinctive feature, because he had witnessed it with his own eyes. Graves plays with the consonants of the final couplet. The "big-bellied" recalls the churning sounds of the expanding stomach. The word "spectacled" plays the sound of a distant round fired at the body and ricocheted (*spec* the initial discharge of the shot, *tac* the bullet striking rock or another hard surface, and *cled* being the bullet's sound as it ricochets of into the distance). Next, "crop-haired" is the sound of a round strike to bloated mass with a quick pause (for the comma,) and, as the pressure begins to release with "Drib-bling black blood", the putrid slimy tar begins to *dripdrop, drop, drop* from the fresh bullet hole, as the final off-rhyme mimics the body relaxing with the last of the gases leaving the flattened body with "from nose and beard". The space where the chaos of war and the order of poetry coexist, and the swollen boy was never the reanimating zombie at all. It was the soldiers in the trenches, face and uniforms covered in sod from the trench walls…These were the ones that were undead.

Chapter III

Understanding "Not Dead"[30]

Two common adages regarding bullets during war: 1.) incoming rounds *always* have the right of way, and 2.) friendly fire isn't friendly. Sure, these sayings may be a little on the more morbid side of humor, but when jokes like these help ease a little of the anxious tensions, help to remind you to stay aware of openings for sniper rounds, as well as to always check your targets before firing, then how much more dangerous can the jokes be compared to the enemy soldiers just on the other side of No-Man's land?

Death doesn't take sides in war. Robert Graves had witnessed the death of numerous soldiers, friend and foe, during his time during World War I. While "A Dead Boche" focused on an unknown enemy German soldier that had died, this poem comments that the state of the living was more difficult. The bloating corpse was just an incidental target between two opposing firing lines. There were no personal connections between the speaker and the decaying body. However, the elegy "Not Dead" was born from the grief and emptiness that Graves felt after the death of one man with whom he had formed a close bond and friendship. While "A Dead Boche" addresses the perception and reaction to a death of an unknown enemy soldier, this chapter will examine the poem "Not Dead" and in what manners it demonstrates how death is approached differently

[30] I first began this chapter in "Poetry, Shell Shock, and the Hidden Influence: Deconstructing Selections from Robert Von Ranke Graves's *Fairies and Fusiliers,*" as my first attempt at writing a chapter draft for this thesis my second semester of Graduate School, Fall 2018.

when the deceased was a close friend. I will again use my own experiences paired with literary research to accomplish this.

"Not Dead" by Robert Graves.

Walking through the trees to cool my heat and pain,
I know that David's with me here again.
All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.
Caressingly I stroke
Rough bark of the friendly oak.
A brook goes bubbling by: the voice is his.
Turf burns with pleasant smoke;
I laugh at chaffinch and at primroses.
All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.
Over the whole wood in a little while
Breaks his slow smile.

(Graves, Robert. *War Poems*. Edited by Charles Mundye. Seren, Wales, 2016, p. 134.)

For some reason, it always seems that those with the most to lose are the ones that make the ultimate sacrifice. During both my deployments, I was a single bachelor with no children. Regardless of the medical issues that I incurred from my time downrange, I continue to consider myself fortunate every day. But like Graves and countless other veterans, I have known others who were not as lucky to make it back, including two friends I knew prior before my time in the service.

Shannon[31] was one of my friends that I graduated high school with. After high school, I enlisted in the Air Force in 2004 and he chose to join the Army as a combat medic in 2008. As tends to happen, we failed to stay in touch over the years. I didn't see him or his wife again until 2010, when I returned home to attend his viewing and funeral. He had been killed in action in Afghanistan. Years later, Shannon, or 'Doc' as he had come to be called, a common nickname of appreciation given to combat medics in the field, was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his sacrifice and actions taken under fire, being credited for saving numerous members of his team during their operation. Shannon and his wife had two young daughters, and, at the time, my oldest daughter was almost seven and my youngest had not even turned three yet. I had no idea what to say to the family that would offer any comfort or support that would sound genuine. The condolences I usually offered or had heard others give at other funerals all seemed empty or cliché to me. Numerous hypotheticals and what-ifs kept forcing themselves into my mind: what would happen if it were me in the casket and what words could help my girls or comfort them. I felt that I was beginning to struggle to maintain military bearing and composure, so I quickly convinced myself of two things: I didn't need to take time away from others that were there who would not be able to make the funeral the next day and also that, after I could change out of uniform later after we left, I should be able to better figure out the right words before the funeral service the next day. However when the time came, I still had none to offer. I can't remember if I even said anything to Shannon's wife at all or if I just briefly embraced her before moving for others to have their time to give their condolences. Almost ten years later, I will see her around town or see their daughter

[31] Out of respect to Shannon and his family, I have not included their last names.

that attends the same grade and school at my youngest, and I still find the right words to be *je ne sais quoi*. I have lost quite a few civilian friends and I have lost friends in the military, but this was the first time I had ever lost a friend that had existed in both spaces of my life. Other than my dad passing in March 2015, Shannon's passing was one of the more difficult deaths for me to compartmentalize.

During the winter of 1915, Robert Graves's battalion joined others for divisional training exercises to prepare for the upcoming Somme offensive. Aside from Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves found one other close friend during his time in France: 2LT David Thomas. David (as Grave preferred to call him) was a second lieutenant in the Welch Fusiliers' Third Battalion. Like Graves and Sassoon, he also shared a fondness for literature. During the few short months before his death, the three came to form a close bond. After the new year, Graves was tasked for a brief special duty assignment before he was able to report to the Somme and rejoin the First Battalion later in March. Even though the battalion had arrived weeks earlier, Graves found their new posting in the trenches of Fricourt still in desperate need of attention upon his arrival. They were filthy, rodent-infested, and ill-constructed in many respects. The location was "where the lines came closer to each other than any other point for miles", with both the Germans and the Welch taking advantage of their close proximities to experiment with "new types of bombs and grenades" (*GTAT-Red.* 160). Shortly after his arrival, during a chance meeting between some of the officers, Graves and David, as well as Capt. M.S. Richardson, 2LT David Pritchard, and the battalion adjutant (whose name Graves never discloses), the soldiers discussed their issues with the incoming mortar rounds. Pritchard, the battalion trench-mortar officer, excitedly boasted that he had just received two of the new "Stokes

mortar-guns" and that he intended to "get some of his own back" the following day, with the new mortar-guns being able to "put four or five shells in the air at once" (161). The adjutant was quite pleased to hear this, remarking that there had been "three hundred casualties in the last month" but it didn't "seem so many as that because, curiously, none of them had been officers. In fact, we've had about hundred casualties in the ranks since Loos, and not a single officer" (161). Even if you are not a superstitious person, there are times when certain comments or observations best remain unsaid. My wife, who is a nurse, will tell you that it is like a jinxing good fortune, as though commenting on how slow a shift is going may as well be a magical spell or challenge against the fates which sets every possible thing that can go wrong into action. This reflection of relief is always best saved for after the danger is passed, not when it is still a possibility. That realization set in when the adjutant "suddenly realized that his words were unlucky," with Thomas quickly shouting for everyone to "Touch wood!"; however, there was none to find for any of them except Graves, who pulled a short pencil from his pocket to which he remarked, "that was enough wood for me"(162). Richardson just replied that he wasn't a superstitious person and I suppose that they all chuckled at the matter before continuing with their night; Graves doesn't say one way or the other.

In his autobiography, Grave describes the following evening as "a weird kind of night, with a bright moon" and that "a continuous exchange of grenades and trench-mortars had begun … but for the first time we were giving the enemy as good as they gave us" (162). Around 2030 hours, while Graves and his men were stacking sandbags to reinforce the trench wall, the sound of enemy rifle fire rang out from the German line. When the news that an officer had been hit was relayed through the ranks, Graves was

informed that it was David Thomas. The initial assessment from Richardson, a fellow officer who had gone to check on Thomas, was that, even though the bullet had struck David in the neck, the wound did not appear to be fatal, especially considering that Thomas walked himself to the medical station (*GTAT-Red.* 161–63). This optimistic appraisal "delighted" Graves because "David should now be away long enough to escape the coming [Somme] offensive, and perhaps even the rest of the war" (*GTAT-Red.* 163). After midnight, as Graves and his team were finishing for the night, he had a brief run-in with Richardson on his way to do a quick check on the team running the barbed wire. As Graves continued towards camp, he heard the sound of mortars hitting the trench, shortly followed by cries for a stretcher and then the exclamation that "Captain Graves is hit!" which though it "raised a general laugh" from Graves and his men, he sent a team to render assistance (163). The rounds had actually hit Richardson, leaving him semi-conscious and stunned in a mortar hole full of water, and Corporal Chamberlen, who lost a leg and later died, as they were inspecting the linework. The doctor checked over Richardson but saw no life-threatening injuries. Again, Graves and Richardson optimistically "felt the same relief in his case as in David's: that he would be out of it for a while" (163). Their joy was cut short as they soon were informed that David Thomas had died, choking to death before the doctor could successfully perform a tracheotomy. Approximately 0100 hours, the adjutant met up with Graves in a company headquarters building, sharing the news that Richardson had died from "the explosion and the cold water had overstrained his heart" (163). Graves noted that the adjutant "looked ghastly" when he had arrive, nervously telling Graves that he was somehow feeling responsible for the deaths of Thomas and Richardson because of his jinxed comment the previous

night, but he continued that, “of course, really, I don’t believe in superstition, …” (163). The adjutant was cut short as “three or four whizz-bang shells burst about twenty yards off,” resulting in another officer fatality as Pritchard had taken “a direct hit,” with the death count totaling three officers and one corporal in one night, all within a span of three hours (162–64). There is another common adage that roughly says that the power is in the pen, but it would seem that, at least for Robert Graves, the luck was in his wooden pencil.

I want to point out one of the most interesting details from the night’s events, the giving of the letter, from my own insights and experiences as a veteran of war. Even though Richardson and the medical doctor were optimistic about Thomas’s chances, given the common associated significance of final letters (which I will further explain), I feel confident that David knew that he was going to die, and I also believe that he had accepted his fate. If the events occurred as Graves portrays, the regimental doctor had instructed Thomas to relax and not try to lift his head, assuring him that he would be fine. As Graves wrote in his autobiography: “David then took a letter from his pocket, gave it to an orderly, and said: ‘Post this!’ It had been written to a girl in Glamorgan, for delivery if he got killed” (163). If David Thomas believed that he was going to be fine, I don’t think his final act would have been to ensure his final letter was given to an orderly. If he did not think he would die and had believed everything would be fine, then the objective purpose for the letter would have continued to exist in its initial state of waiting in limbo, fulfilling its primary objective by remaining within his pocket. But David did not wait for the letter to assume its secondary objective naturally; he forced the secondary purpose into action. Yes, I acknowledge that I am arguing the significance of a letter, one that was probably written by hand, and I acknowledge that I am anthropomorphizing a

combination of at least two paper products, a sheet of paper and an envelope. But this letter holds great importance within military tradition and culture. For civilian readers who don't understand, I will try to explain.

[32] Final-letters-home, if-I-die's, dead-sends—the specific nomenclatures may differ for any number of reasons, but regardless of what they are called, these written correspondences are a long tradition within many militaries across the world. When that tradition was explained to me, *death-letters* was the name used and has since been the nomenclature I use. Their purpose was presented much as an operational mission. The letters have a primary objective and two possible secondary objectives. The primary operational objective is simply for the letter to exist and be ready to send if the time comes (meaning that the servicemember dies in the line of duty). If the servicemember survives, the secondary operational objective becomes the new primary: destroy the letter. If the servicemember dies, then the alternate secondary operational objective becomes the new primary: for the letter to be found and either delivered or mailed to the designated recipient. I have also heard the latter secondary objective referred to as the contingency plan, which I suppose is the much more optimistic in terms, as *contingency* usually refers to plans that go into place if the original plan fails. Regarding exactly *what* death-letters are, they are personal written correspondences that serve as a means of sharing some final thoughts and last words which servicemembers write and carry on their person. They are usually kept either in a pack they carry or in a breast pocket.

[32] During my final semester of my undergraduate program, I began to test ideas for what I may have wanted to eventually write for this very thesis I am writing now. Those efforts produced my essay "Sewing the Peace at Home by Sowing the Fields Afar and Planting the Union Jack in Foreign Soil: Deconstructing Rupert Brooke's 'The Soldier'." While I eventually found Graves's style to be more relatable as compared with Brooke, the inclusion of this revised excerpt on *death-letters* from the Spring 2018 essay fill its original long-term intent.

Alternatively. they may also be stored in a safe place where the letter can be found in the event of their demise, such as a locker or in the outside snap pocket on their duffle bag. Only *after* the servicemember dies should the death-letter be delivered to whomever the envelope is addressed. If no person was designated, then it should be sent to the person's next-of-kin. The contents contained within these letters vary depending on the author. Some write of regrets, words never spoken, apologies never given, dreams never to be realized. Other are written to express best wishes for friends, advice for children never to be seen again (sometimes even never to have been met), gratitude for guidance and support from parents, or final attempts to best express the author's love for their spouse. The most common sentiments written are the attempts to put loved ones at ease. Whether that means sharing a personal or religious belief; reaffirming the importance in supporting the mission; or, most importantly, offering reassurances that their death is not without reason or cause, but is a necessary sacrifice for the greater good. The concept of *death-letters* may seem simple enough, but these are letters that many take quite seriously, striving for precision and clarity, each word carefully chosen so as to convey the exact intended meaning, thought, tone, and emotion without any possible ambiguity. If this does not seem overly difficult to do once, take into consideration that death-letters often must be rewritten, possibly multiple times, and sometimes without the original to use as a template due to mud, rain, or other elements which render the original illegible.

I found writing my own death-letter for the first time at nineteen to have been one of the more difficult things I did as a young servicemember. Even with pen put to paper, I struggled to face my own mortality. I had no idea what I should write to provide comfort for my family. Above all my other concerns, I wanted to not come across as a complete

fool. It is difficult and unsettling to write about your death that may never even happen, and even harder to do so in a meaningful manner. I often could not sleep as I struggled to comprehend that the letter in an envelope and Ziploc bag may serve as the final memory anyone would have of me. I became concerned that my final words would come across as clichéd or worse, that they may be misunderstood. Eventually, I did find the words to write, and each new letter would be easier than the last. I also never wrote the same letter twice. Once the death-letter was no longer needed, either because I had returned from the combat zone or because I had constructed a newer version, I made it a point to burn each one completely. I found it surprisingly therapeutic, as though every worry and concern that I had put into each message also burned away to ash. After almost dying during an attack in Iraq, my fear of death also lessened, and as a result my words began assuming a much more leisurely and hopeful tone, writing of my possible death as "just one of those things that can happen in war." I have toyed with the idea of continuing to write and store letters now that I am a parent and a civilian, but it is difficult to maintain a letter that holds relevance when the recipients are a part of your daily life. That is not to say it is impossible though. I have heard of certain groups of civilians that follow the tradition, but they are often with the more dangerous professions such as law enforcement officers or federal field agents. I have also heard of some writing journals that follow the same idea, but also give much more insight to longer periods of time. I am sure that David knew he was going to die and his last effort in life was to ensure his death-letter would fulfill its mission.

Although Robert Graves had known all three of the officers that died during the attack, he grieved most for his close friend David Thomas. In fact, Graves writes in his

autobiography: “I felt David’s death worse than any other since I had been in France, but it did not anger me as it did Siegfried… I just felt empty and lost” (*GTAT-Red.* 164). As a means of coping with his grief, Graves produced two poems in David Thomas’s memory: “Not Dead” and “Goliath and David”. Of the two works written for David, “Goliath and David” was “really a personal [work], rather than a ‘war’, poem” (*Life and Work* 47). More recently, Jean Moorcroft Wilson dug further into the process of the two poems. Wilson argues against Graves’s account he provided in his autobiography as to writing “Goliath and David” over six months after David Thomas died. Wilson states that she has found an early draft in the RWF Archives which she claims “suggests that it was started much earlier in the trenches while his anger and grief at the death of his ‘best friend’, together with his memory of it, were still intense” (144–45). Comparing the earlier draft with what the poem eventually evolved into, I personally find the latter, finished version to be lacking in many respects. Yes, I agree with Wilson and Seymour-Smith; what the poem became is no longer a true example of Graves’s war poem. To analyze it as such would not be the same as if Graves had continued with his initial direction set in the trenches. The aesthetic of the piece being *war poetry* faded with the months Graves worked on the poem. However, the construction of “Not Dead” began the day after David’s death, with Graves sending the first draft to Edward Marsh, who lauded the poem as his favorite from the *Goliath and David* collection, on April 4, about two and a half weeks, 16 days, later (Wilson 144). The next evening after the attack, a burial service was held for David Thomas on 19 March 1916. In Richard P. Graves’s biography on his Uncle Robert, Richard describes the funeral:

> Sassoon was one of the mourners, and noted that Robert Graves stood beside him, with his white whimsical face twisted and grieving. Once we could not hear the solemn words for the noise of a machine-gun along the line; and when all was finished a canister fell a few hundred yards away to burst with a crash. So [David] left us, a gentle soldier, perfect and without stain. (qtd. in *Assault* 143–144)

The two remaining friends of their once-merry trio shared in their grief. So much had just occurred in the last twenty-four hours and, even during a funeral service, the fighting still continued. I think Robert Graves could have named the poem after how he and Sassoon were initially feeling. They were terribly saddened and upset. They were rattled and shocked. And maybe they still held some speck of impossible hope that it had all been just some terrible nightmare or a temporary mental breakdown they could return from to find their friend still alive… not dead.

Before I can get into the analysis of the poem's text, I have found that the format of "Not Dead" requires attention first. Like most operations in war, the terrain must first be surveyed and mapped out to understand the scope of the battlefield, defining the shape and contours as well as the boundaries. Given his extensive formal literary education, I believe Robert Graves was very deliberate in his format and style choices. For "Not Dead", Graves creates boundaries and key locations in his poem which can be mapped out by analyzing the rhyme scheme (R.S.), number of syllables per line (#SYL.), and meter (MTR.); so, to accurately discuss the textual meaning of the poem, I will explain the format in detail. To do so, I have mapped out the poem on page 81 to demonstrate all the formatting features:

Line #	R.S.	MTR.	#SYL.	**"Not Dead"** by Robert Graves[33]	R.S.: / a / a / B / c / c / b / c / b / B / d / d /
					MTR.: 6 / 5 / 5 / 3 / 3 / 5 / 3 / 5 / 5 / 5 / 3
					#SYL:11 / 10/ 10 / 6 / 7 / 10 / 6 / 10 / 10 / 10 / 4
1	**a**	**6**	**11**	Walking through the trees to cool my heat and pain,	
2	**a**	**5**	**10**	I know that David's with me here again.	
3	**B**	**5**	**10**	All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.	
4	**c**	**3**	**6**	Caressingly I stroke	
5	**c**	**3**	**7**	Rough bark of the friendly oak.	
6	**b**	**5**	**10**	A brook goes bubbling by: the voice is his.	
7	**c**	**3**	**6**	Turf burns with pleasant smoke;	
8	**b**	**5**	**10**	I laugh at chaffinch and at primroses.	
9	**B**	**5**	**10**	All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.	
10	**d**	**5**	**10**	Over the whole wood in a little while	
11	**d**	**3(*)**	**4(*)**	Breaks his slow smile	

(Graves, Robert. *War Poems*. Edited by Charles Mundye. Seren, Wales, 2016, p. 134.)
Mapped and annotated by Brian Phinazee.

Map Key for "Not Dead"			
Line#	Line Number	**R.S.**	Rhyme Scheme
MTR.	Meter (number of beats)	**#SYL.**	Number of syllables per line
3(*)	Acephalous (headless) line that drops the unaccented first syllable.		
4(*)	Graves's artistic use of suppressed/omitted syllables complete the couplet.		
B	The uppercase *B*'s signify the boundaries of the envelope structure, as explained in this chapter of this thesis.		

[33] "Not Dead", mapped out by me, Brian C. Phinazee, for the purpose of this thesis. See also: Appendix A. (Graves, Robert. *War Poems*. Edited by Charles Mundye. Seren, Wales, 2016, p. 134.)

Looking over the patterns, it is most important to take note of lines three and nine. While the designated symbol is the letter *b* which repeats more through the poem, these two lines are specifically paired and redesignated with a capitalized *B* because they share the same verbiage exactly: "All that is simple, happy, strong, he is." (Lines 3 and 9). While often such repetition is a refrain, like a chorus or hook of a song, the lines' function is different for this work. "Not Dead" has been presented in an "Envelope", which the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* explains as a pattern that is "a special case of repetition [where] a line or stanza will recur in the same or nearly the same form so as to enclose other material" (241). Lines 3 and 9 function as the borders to create the envelope pattern, as signified by the boldened borders of the provided map. The enclosed five lines, 4–8, create a new quintet stanza and a new metaphorical space. This in turn also separates the outside rhymed couplets of lines 1–2 and 10–11 from the rest of the poem, each representing their own symbolic spaces. The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* explains that "the envelope pattern is distinguished from the refrain in that the repetitions here affect the enclosed material rather than the material preceding each occurrence" (241). With this understanding, the format and distinct boundaries of the poem are established.

Graves's implementation of the envelope pattern creates different effects for the poem. The first two lines are separated from the rest the rest of the poem with the rhyming couplets. As the first line begins, Graves is trying to find some momentary relief from his grief and anger, as he sets off: "Walking through trees to cool my heat and pain," (Line 1). Graves was not one to usually focus on nature in his early war poetry, although this is a common recurring trait in the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon. But Graves

is also devastated after the death of his friend, David. Trying to separate himself from his constant environment of war, it would make sense that Graves would want to find somewhere pleasant for his setting. Though David has not become a part of the woods, Graves is unable to find solace on the battlefield to grieve and remember his friend due to the chaos of war. The forests of France would likely at least be a change of scenery from the trenches and a good place to find solitude so as to clear his thoughts. But despite the rural setting, the poem's form indicates that death and the trenches follow him. Given that his journey will be following the path as the lines dictate, Graves has also transformed his poem into a katabasis, or descent into an afterlife and the envelope form also presents a symbolic grave design. The paired couplets, lines 1–2 and lines 10–11, represent and address more to the realm of the living. These envelope lines 3 and 9 are also the edges of a grave, the path entrance, line three, and exit, line nine, to and from the realm of the afterlife. The quintet stanza in the decent down into the realm of the afterlife with lines 4 and 5, with line 6 representing the lowest point, and line 7 and 8 representing the rising side and the return to the realm of the living, passing through the border again with line 9. As he reaches the end of the first line, he pauses (as suggested by the comma.)

And then he steps into line two. Graves immediately comes to realize, "I know that David's here with me again." (Line 2). Graves feels David's proximity, he *knows* his friend is close. But the last word "again" in line two creates at least two possibilities of meaning. Robert Graves writes in *Goodbye to All That* saying, "I felt David's death worse than any other since I had been in France… I just felt empty and lost" (*GTAT-Red*. 164). Could the emptiness be slowly filling with each metric step closer? Or maybe the choice to use the word "again" is to say that this is not his first mental journey seeking

solace and that the emptiness returns over and over. What is clear is that Graves believes that David is still with him after death even if not in person, perhaps either in spirit or, considering the religious conflicts that Graves suffered during the war, at least David's memory still remains and continues to return. Graves writes in *Goodbye to All That*, "I wondered whether I could endure to the end with faith unto salvation… My breaking point was near now, unless something happened to stave it off (*GTAT-Red*. 164).

As Graves crosses line three, he has crossed into the envelope, the first poetic fulcrum or line of separation, a symbolic border between two worlds, and the grave's edge. I believe these poetically designated lines function as liminal spaces, much like limbo between the realm of the living and the afterlife. Or maybe the metaphorical grave of lines 4–8 is limbo and we have only just arrived at the threshold with the envelope lines being the symbolic doorways. When Graves first met David, he described him in his autobiography as "simple, gentle, fond of reading" (*GTAT-Red.*149). In this space where the two realms meet, the sentimentalities of the autobiography are familiarly echoed, but not repeated exactly, as "All that is simple, happy, strong, he is." (Line 3). Friendships forged through wartime experiences just feel so different from other relationships. We see each other at our worst moments, but we also share in our personal triumphs and successes. I have friends from my time overseas that I haven't physically seen in years, but we call back and forth fairly often and we are always able to carry on as if we weren't on different coasts of the continent or completely different hemispheres of the world. David was this type of friend for Graves.

Line four moves out of limbo into the trench-like grave of the afterlife. However, the grave shares many similarities with the trenches as an environment that is also dug

into the earth and was often a place of death, and in the trenches is also a place that Graves and David were intimately familiarly with. He moves into this space and reaches out: “caressingly I stroke / Rough bark of the friendly oak.” (Lines 4 and 5). If someone caresses anything, as in line four, it is always done with care and most often also with love and admiration. A *caressing stroke* could be as a lover or perhaps even a mother or father brushing hair out of the face of the one they love. For Graves, I would venture to say that this was a gesture from a friendly or fraternal devotion. The word *stroke* can commonly be understood to be a lingering touch, a motion of affection or consideration; however, *stroke* has eight different entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, four entries for noun usage with thirty definitions and four entries for verb usage with twenty definitions, fifty different definitions total. For the use within the poem, Graves is using *stroke* as a verb. I believe the most applicable *Oxford English Dictionary* verbal definitions of *stroke* for this poem are:

> V1.: 1A. To rub (a surface) softly with the hand or some implement; to pass the hand softly in one direction over (the head, body, hair, of a person or animal) by way of caress or as a method of healing; 1D. to stroke against the hair, the wrong way (of the hair): to rub (an animal) in the direction opposite to the natural lie of its hair; figurative to irritate, ruffle, cross (a person). Similarly to stroke with the hair, to soothe; 1I. To pass (one's hand) gently over a surface; 9. Printing. To move (a sheet) into place by a stroking-movement of the hand; V2.: I2. To depict with strokes of the brush; I5. Of a bell: to chime the strokes of (the hour, etc.). V3.: To go quickly; to travel; V4.: To lay out (a corpse). (“Stroke” V1, V2, V3, V4, *OED.com*)

The common connotation is very close to any of the definitions of V1. 1A, 1D, or 1I with few minor differences. Definition V1. 9 could be a play on the act of writing the poem, as though turning over a page to write, although the poem is a single stanza. Definition V2. I2 may also be a play on Graves writing the poem, much as an artist painting a portrait and I5 may be like a metaphorical ringing of the bells, such as the chiming of funeral bells from a church. Definition V3. when used with the full line of "Caressingly I stroke" can be read as "lovingly I move forward with my journey" (Line 4). Definition V4 carries a less loving connotation from the rest: as in to die from a stroke. Without a period or any punctuation, this line offers a play of multiplicities, with the enjambment into the next line possibly meaning multiple positive ideas, and an opposing rereading of line four by itself allowing for the possible negative translation to similarly mean "lovingly I perish", as though life without David may not be a life worth continuing. There are also possible homosexual explicit connotations that may be inferred.[34]

[34] In Jean Moorcroft Wilson's biography, she quotes Peter Parker's argument that Graves "associated the Great War with homosexuality, producing a homosexual melodrama," but Wilson also notes that Graves denied being homosexual himself, assessing that the first marriage to Nancy Nicholson and the birth of their four children "in quick succession" was "undertaken partly to 'prove' his heterosexuality" (7). David Thomas's grand-niece, Anne Marsh Penton, also questions the possibility of a homosexual relationship between the two soldiers in her essay "Over the Whole Wood: Robert Graves and the Significance of David Thomas." Penton cites Paul O' Prey and his theory that "Not Dead" is Graves's "second homosexual love poem, although confident that 'it is an affirmation of Graves's intimate but 'pure' (that is, non-consummated) relationship with Thomas" [sic] (480). She also points to Paul Fussell who describes "Not Dead" as the poet's "sensuous little ode" (478). Penton concludes her essay saying that:

> By falling in love with Thomas, Graves may have found his period of so-called 'pseudo-homosexuality' uncomfortably extended, and Thomas's death may have been the incident that buried these feelings irrevocably" and that "the poem's final couplet […] suggests perhaps a yearning that never entirely vanished. (487–488)

In my own opinion, and without being able to directly asks Robert Graves for his own account, I do not believe the relationship to have been homosexual at all. Instead, I believe the love was more of the strong brotherly love and comradery formed between soldiers through the extreme circumstances of war.

As an enjambment continuing from line four, the fifth line is: “Rough bark of the friendly oak.” (Line 5). The harshness (*rough*) in line five is in direct opposition to the sensations being presented in line four, at least one understanding of it, that is. The rough bark may be in reference back to line one, the trees of the scenery being oak. Or maybe the tree is metaphorical or allegorical of how David (and so many others in the fighting) responded to the war. Maybe he was an efficient soldier that had been battle-hardened to the outside world, but beneath he was a gentler man Graves admired so much. The exterior bark representing the stoic emotional roughness that has resulted from war and the white purity of the oak tree’s meat underneath representing the innocence of the inner soul. One other consideration of the friendly oak I have considered is to be a fancy way of describing the coffin in which David’s body is resting. If this last translated reading were correct, when combined with the previous line, Graves is lovingly laying his hand with a heavy heart on top of David Thomas’s coffin. This gesture is common still, particularly for closed-casket funerals.

Line six is the central crossing point of the poem, the lowest point in the grave and the point of his katabasis journey where Graves must decide whether to begin his return to the living or continue further into the afterlife searching for David. As Graves follows this line, he hears running water as, “A brook goes bubbling by:” and the colon forces a momentary caesura before he comprehends that “the voice is his.” (Line 6). It is here, in the lowest point of the valley, that Graves has found the sound that is David’s voice and the comfort he has been searching for. The iambic rhythm of the river forms a beat as if his pulse echoed through the valley. Finally, Graves has found the cooling waters to soothe his heat and pain that he has carried since learning of David’s death. It is

in this central line that David resides, just as he is the central focus of the poem and the center of Graves's emotional turmoil. In this moment, Robert can *feel* David's compassion and he begins to let go of some of that pain and anger, and here he begins his return from the afterlife and ascent out of the grave into line 7.

As he starts his ascent, the "Turf burns with pleasant smoke;" but this time the burning sensation isn't of pain and anger, but a warmth of comfort; a burning sense of compassion, and a twisted combination with the association between nostalgic burning of turf like peat with the burning smoke of war as a result of trauma (Line 7). In an earlier draft included in the *War Poems* collection, the line in the poem is "Wood burns with pleasant smoke" which I think feels much more welcoming, like a campfire or a fireplace in a cottage (Line 4, *War Poems* 308). The conscious choice to move the line to after the midline is much more positive, with the ascending return to the realm of the living having the welcoming sense rather than the descent into the afterlife. However, the line also may hold a less-obvious foreshadowing. Graves had experienced a major trauma. As Joshua Pederson theorizes,

> In trauma, the horrific moment arrives with such world-shattering force that it scrambles the brain's function, and the victim is unable to process the experience in a normal way. Trauma forces the self into hiding, and while the sensory manifold keeps "recording" sights, sounds, smells, and feelings, the brain fails to work them through. (335)

When Graves initially began writing this poem, he had not had time to process the events of that night or the effect on him from David's death. As I pointed out earlier, Jean Moorcroft Wilson noted that Graves started writing "Not Dead" the day after Thomas's

death and had sent his first complete draft to Edward Marsh in April (144). Because of the trauma, it is possible that the correlations of smell were further complicated between childhood memories and his perceptions of war. The turf that is burning in line seven may very well be in reference to the destruction of the battlefields, burned or burning from mortar fire. In this line, this smell that may previously have been a sensorial reminder of war for Graves is further complicated as he realizes it to now also be shared as one more pleasant mental *aide-mémoire* of the time he shared with David. Graves is not able to fully work through his mental sensory associations of good or bad after the trauma of the brutal March 1916 attack which is further complicated by his worsening neurasthenic condition and symptoms, therefore the pleasantness of the smoke is more of a familiarity than anything else. These conflicting associative memories demonstrate one instance of similar experiences faced by other soldiers with neurasthenia. Fragrances that had once alluded to fond thoughts and moments in their lives now may share the same mental space and relationships as odors which may suddenly bring back horrific memories from the war. The exact correlation between scent and memory is also not always something that can be easily pinned to a single object, source, or instance. Graves admittedly struggled with certain smells triggering his own neurasthenic episodes for much of his life even long after the war (Seymour 60–61). Many accounts and recreations of World War I in different mediums, such as book or film, most often depict the skies to be dark and thick with smoke. While the smell of a campfire may be pleasant to many, experiencing that fragrance when combined with gunpowder, dirt, burnt flesh, or other assorted materials, can create new sensorial translations for individuals for memories of putrid stenches or other grotesqueries. Distinguishing the individual sources of smells can

be quite difficult as well, further complicating sensorial associations. My mother's father, who served as Military Police during World War II in Germany, spoke very little of his time in the war with anyone. Nevertheless, the one detail the he would often point out was that, above everything else, he always remembered the pungent stench of death. For Graves, the smell of burning turf was no longer just a good memory of nostalgia or a bad memory of the battlefield; the association of the smell also became a mixed connective sensorial memory he shared of his time with David as well as a memory of David's death.

In line eight, Graves writes the line, "I laugh at chaffinch and at primroses." (Line 8). As he mentions in his autobiography, Graves returned to the First Battalion on the Somme from his special duty assignment at Havre in March, during a time which he describes as "the primrose season" (*GTAT-Red*. 159). These small yellow primrose flowers also appeared in the poem "1915" as Graves describes watching the changing seasons with "Primroses and the first warm day of Spring" (Line 3, *The Complete Poems* 20). The flowers and birds are common associative signs of Spring, emblematic of hope and the newness and vitality of life and new beginnings. Anne Marsh Penton also writes that David Thomas's mother would refer to him as her "cheerful chattering chaffinch," which, given the close bond between the two soldiers, may have been something which Graves was aware of and this line may be "a covert reference to an intimate conversation" between the two men (484). Yet this is one more line that can be juxtapositional. Though the spring of 1916 brought a brutal end to David's life and future, Graves is returning to his warzone reality with a new sense of calm serenity and optimism. Robert Graves came into the poem as a lost and defeated man; but as can be

derived from his laughter, he is returning with hope and faith that he has found a new means to cherish and restore David's memory thereby also symbolically restoring his spirit in the world of the living.

Line nine brings us out of the grave and back to the threshold, the liminal space between fantasy and reality, concluding his katabasis journey with his return from the realm of the dead to the world the living, and the closing end of the envelope. Graves began the journey because he was lost and alone. Inconsolable. He felt empty and alone. Though he *knows* David was with him, he could not locate his friend. For the first half of the poem, Graves searches for David's presence without locating him. But it was during his travels that Graves finally realized where his friend could be found. As the repeated line say, "All that is simple, happy, strong, he is." (Line 9). With an additional unsaid word to end the line, the realization for Graves becomes "he is *there*."(Line 9). Graves has completed his katabasis and returned having found some level of comfort and understanding. He has found faith in his journey, realizing that David may be found again in his own memories. He has realized that he may once again feel David's presence wherever he may find a time that is simple, a time or place where he is happy, and when he is strong. When Graves reaches that place in his life, he will once again be able to find David. He takes the memory of David and their friendship back with him. But at this moment, maybe Robert Graves has also found himself again. But I believe lines 3 and 9 are symbolic in their repetition and placement. The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* explains that the envelope pattern creates an effect "to emphasize the unity of the enclosed portions, to indicate that elaborations or parallels of statement have not departed from the original focus" (241). I believe that the unified meaning is that David

was always with Robert Graves, even when he was unaware and searching, and that realization is a main focus of the overall poem. As the *Princeton Encyclopedia* also explains, "the repeated words carry an added richness from the intervening lines, sometimes acquiring an almost incantatory force" (241). Graves writes that an anthem they often would sing was, "He that shall endure to the end, shall be saved," explaining that "the words repeated in my [Graves's] head, like a charm, whenever things went wrong" (*GTAT Red*. 164). These words, "All that is simple, happy, strong, he is," come to serve as a new incantatory force, a phrase that, when repeated, helped to reinforce Graves's hope with each recitation offering a renewed vigor (Lines 3 and 9).

The final two lines of the poem are: "Over the whole wood in a little while / Breaks his slow smile." (Line 10–11). After David's death, Robert Graves had been able to take medical leave in April away from the frontlines of France, returning to England for rhinoplasty surgery to correct an old boxing injury so that he could use the new gas masks that were being implemented. During that time, he attended the Good Friday services at his parent's congregation, later confessing that it "was the last occasion on which [he] attended a church service" and further demonstrating his departure from his Christian upbringing and beliefs (*GTAT-Red*. 165) When David had died, Graves was emotionally and psychologically hit hard. After Graves returned from his surgery, he returned back to some of the worst battles of World War I. He had been able to reconcile his emotions from David's death and he knew what he would need to make it through the war unscathed: a place that was simple, a place that was happy, and somewhere that he could stay strong. Graves knew this because, as he confessed:

> my breaking point was near now, unless something happened to stave it off. Not that I felt frightened. I had never yet lost my head and turned tail through fright, and knew that I never would. Nor would the breakdown come as insanity; I did not have it in me. It would be a general nervous collapse, with tears and twitchings and dirty trousers; [as] I had seen cases like that. (*GTAT-Red*. 164)

Line ten does not only harken to the location of the poem's opening scenery, but it also foreshadows the upcoming battles of the Somme offensive. The fighting did not only take place in the wide-open fields, but also in the town and forests. During the Somme campaign, Graves survived the attack of Mametz Woods, one of the bloodiest battles on the offensive. However, during the attack on High Wood a few short days later, Graves was seriously wounded and prematurely pronounced dead. That is why the couplet of lines 10 and 11 is uneven and do not each have five meters, ten syllables. The final line is the shortest of the pair and the more complicated line in the poem, with only four written syllables but is a written trimester, an acephalous line with an iamb followed by a spondee, two stressed and ascending beats. The poetic choice to omit or suppress the remaining syllables signify the results from the Great War. The emptiness manifested from war remains in the emptiness of this final line of the poem. Graves knew he would never again know calm, find real peace, or survive to be strong. Contemplating the impending battles, he understood that he would never again be able to find what those missing six syllables represented. I believe at the time of writing the poem, those six syllables were once David Cuthbert Thomas (*Da•vid • Cuth•bert • Tho•mas*), but that wasn't who Graves would eventually miss the most. It was not the memory of David that would break. These six missing syllables also represent someone else that had been

broken, never again to find his former happiness, a person who would succumb to neurasthenia for the rest of his life… Robert Von Ranke Graves (*Rob•bert•Von•Rank•ke•Graves*).

Chapter IV

CONCLUSION

Robert Graves was a very public figure who survived for nearly a century. He has over a hundred different publications to his credit, including over 1200 poems. He also passed away the same year I was born, which means that, at the time of my writing, he has been dead for over thirty-four years. Multiple articles and bibliographies have been written about the man, including two family's generations of writers in the case or Martin Seymour-Smith and his daughter Miranda Seymour, and more continue to still be published regularly.

It was never my intent to sway or change the literary conversation; I intended only join in and become a part of it. During the process of writing this thesis, I have been surprised by how the subject material affected me. I found myself emotionally involved at times, particularly when reading Robert Graves's own accounts of his time in France during World War I, and found myself simultaneously replaying my own experiences in my mind.

In the end, I have gained more respect for Robert Graves as an accomplished and entertaining writer, a brave and honorable veteran, and as a complicated but mostly decent human being.

As I had expected, Robert Graves's neurasthenic condition is well documented in multiple texts and even further confirmed by his own admissions. These effects of Graves's neurasthenia and from his multiple trauma of war also are present in his war

poems and, although written with creative and journalistic styling, I wanted to go through and demonstrate how a fellow veteran would find and interpret those symptoms within the text. While many of the specific instances are easily shared between civilian and veteran readers alike, it is my hope that I have provided some additional perspective with these poems.

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APPENDIX A:

Complete visual references for the poems used for this thesis.

Visual Reference 1. *"A Dead Boche" poem as appears in entirety*

"A Dead Boche"

To you who'd read my songs of War
  And only hear of blood and fame,
I'll say (you've heard it said before)
  "War's Hell!" and if you doubt the same,
Today I found in Mametz Wood
  A certain cure for lust of blood:

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,
  In a great mess of things unclean,
Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk
  With clothes and face a sodden green,
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
  Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

(Graves, Robert. *War Poems*. Edited by Charles Mundye. Seren, Wales, 2016, p. 108.)

Visual Reference 2: *"Not Dead" poem as appears in entirety*

"Not Dead"

Walking through the trees to cool my heat and pain,
I know that David's with me here again.
All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.
Caressingly I stroke
Rough bark of the friendly oak.
A brook goes bubbling by: the voice is his.
Turf burns with pleasant smoke;
I laugh at chaffinch and at primroses.
All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.
Over the whole wood in a little while
Breaks his slow smile.

(Graves, Robert. *War Poems*. Edited by Charles Mundye. Seren, Wales, 2016, p. 134.)

Visual Reference 3. *"Not Dead" poem, mapped out with annotations:*

Line #	R.S.	MTR.	#SYL.	**"Not Dead"** by Robert Graves[35]	R.S.: / a / a / B / c / c / b / c / b / B / d / d /
					MTR.: 6 / 5 / 5 / 3 / 3 / 5 / 3 / 5 / 5 / 5 / 3
					#SYL:11 / 10/ 10 / 6 / 7 / 10 / 6 / 10 / 10 / 10 / 4
1	**a**	**6**	**11**	Walking through the trees to cool my heat and pain,	
2	**a**	**5**	**10**	I know that David's with me here again.	
3	**B**	**5**	**10**	All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.	
4	**c**	**3**	**6**	Caressingly I stroke	
5	**c**	**3**	**7**	Rough bark of the friendly oak.	
6	**b**	**5**	**10**	A brook goes bubbling by: the voice is his.	
7	**c**	**3**	**6**	Turf burns with pleasant smoke;	
8	**b**	**5**	**10**	I laugh at chaffinch and at primroses.	
9	**B**	**5**	**10**	All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.	
10	**d**	**5**	**10**	Over the whole wood in a little while	
11	**d**	**3(*)**	**4(*)**	Breaks his slow smile	

(Graves, Robert. *War Poems*. Edited by Charles Mundye. Seren, Wales, 2016, p. 134.)
Mapped and annotated by Brian Phinazee.

Map Key for "Not Dead"			
Line#	Line Number	**R.S.**	Rhyme Scheme
MTR.	Meter (number of beats)	**#SYL.**	Number of syllables per line
3(*)	Acephalous (headless) line that drops the unaccented first syllable.		
4(*)	Graves's artistic use of suppressed/omitted syllables complete the couplet.		
B	The uppercase *B*'s signify the boundaries of the envelope structure, as explained in this chapter of this thesis.		

[35] "Not Dead", mapped out by me, Brian C. Phinazee, for the purpose of this thesis. See also: Appendix A. (Graves, Robert. *War Poems*. Edited by Charles Mundye. Seren, Wales, 2016, p. 134.)

Appendix B:

Personally-owned Pictures from my time in Iraq, 2006

Image 1: Phinazee, Brian. *I, LandShark, the Crew's War Poet, 70th MTD, 2006*. 2006, Iraq, Undisclosed.

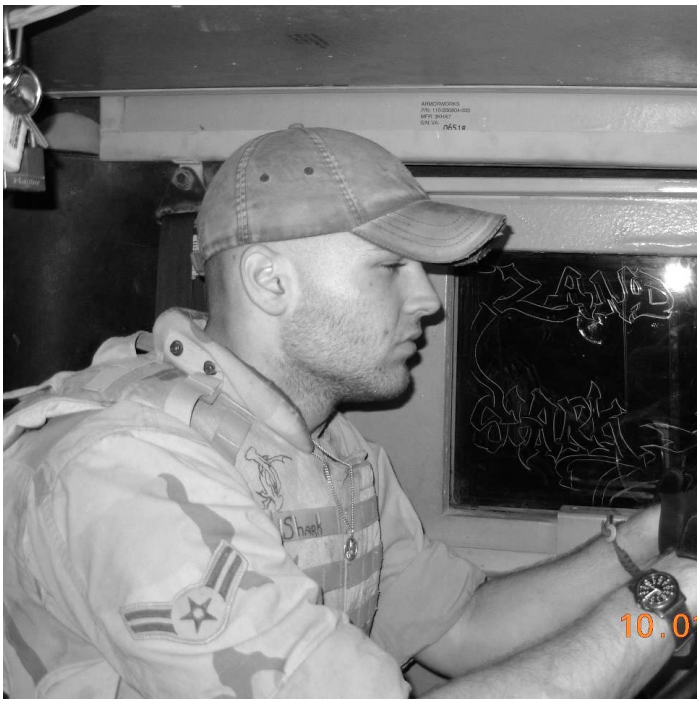

Image 2: Phinazee, Brian. *Driving into the Darkness, 70th MTD, 2006*. 2006, Iraq, Undisclosed.

Image 3: Phinazee, Brian. *Smiling even with Hard Work , 70th MTD, 2006*. 2006, Iraq, Undisclosed.

Image 4: Phinazee, Brian. *Papi's Crew, 70th MTD, 2006*. 2006, Iraq, Undisclosed.