

Robert Graves, *The Anger of Achilles* and the ‘Party of Hector’

John Woodrow Presley

In May 1957 Robert Graves began the task of translating Homer’s *Iliad* into prose. The *Iliad* was the only long poem Graves liked; he insisted that the *Iliad* had been written for entertainment, not for its author’s fame. ‘He had long felt’, says Martin Seymour-Smith in *Robert Graves: His Life and Work*, ‘that the only viable way to translate Homer was “as if it were an ancient Irish epic: prose laced with lyrics”’.¹ The work of translating Homer went very quickly, indeed. The manuscripts show that it was fast work, but thoughtfully, carefully done.

Graves thought the accretive method by which the *Iliad* had been built up over time by many poets, each attempting the same style, had led to a very corrupt text (as he indicates here and there in *The Anger of Achilles* with irresistible footnotes pointing out his deletion of long passages that he thought had clearly been inserted later, merely to flatter some prince or patron). Graves interrupts his prose, infrequently at first, by wonderfully compact lyric similes and by invocations presented in poetic form. As the action nears its climax in the later books, poetic forms appear more frequently, and in addition to the similes, entire songs and lamentations appear. The similes, as in the *Iliad*, are repetitive: the defensive warrior is compared to a shepherd, the aggressive warrior to a hunter or animal of prey; the domestic warrior is compared, as he leaves Troy, to a stallion protecting his herd. Graves’s subtle changes in metre and rhyme on these repeated figures are worth a study themselves.

The manuscripts of *The Anger of Achilles* also show an interesting aspect of Graves’s work habits: his reliance upon his secretary, Kenneth (Karl) Gay, as an editor.² Gay’s editing never quite becomes collaboration; it is, rather, as Graves himself says

in his dedication of *The Anger of Achilles* to Gay, ‘patient critical help’. But there is no denying that Gay’s help shapes Graves’s prose style in this work to a considerable extent.

The Anger of Achilles was apparently translated book by book rather than in complete drafts, since some early chapters went through many more revisions than others did. Graves wrote a draft of a book of his translation in ink, then Gay typed a second draft, incorporating whatever interlinear changes – or oral instructions – Graves provided. Then both Graves and Gay edited this draft, Graves invariably changing the diction of the sentence, making his language more precise and his grammar more balanced and elegant. Gay, careful always to use a contrasting pen or pencil, underlined repetitions, inconsistencies, and diction choices to be questioned – ‘town or city?’ is a typical example of Gay’s editing. Gay even helps with deleting function words which, along with the slightly formalised diction, helps create the characteristic sound and rhythm of *The Anger of Achilles*.

The prose is, as the *Iliad* would demand, highly stylised. Graves’s editing, for example, changes the opening sentence of Book 2 into a rhythmic approximation of the *Iliad*’s formality and structure:

Draft 1: All the chariot-driving Greek officers and all the Gods, except Zeus, slept through that night.

Draft 2: Not only all the Greeks of chariot-driving rank, but all the gods too, with the sole exception of Zeus, slept through that night.

Draft 3: Not only every Greek of chariot-driving rank, but every Olympian too, Zeus alone excepted, slept the whole night through.

Reviewers of *The Anger of Achilles* were generally positive, and tended to focus on Graves’s stylistic shifts and his decision to put

the bulk of the epic in prose. 'It is certainly the most charming translation in English since Pope's, and may also be the best', wrote a reviewer for *Time*, although the reviewer was not certain 'whether or not Graves's *Iliad* will endure as a satire'.³ But the reviewer certainly enjoyed the attitude implied by Graves's insistence 'that the *Iliad* was meant to be entertainment, not solemn tragedy'. The *Time* reviewer cites some critical moments for the satire: 'And when Hector, the Trojan leader, offers to stake the whole war on a single combat, the Greeks respond at first with resounding silence.' Menelaus takes up the challenge, 'but quickly lets himself be talked out of it'. Rather fearfully, the Greeks resort to choosing by lot, and Ajax is chosen: 'He and Hector spar for a minute and then agree it is really too dark to fight' ('Olympian Satire', p. 107).

In the 'Introduction' to *The Anger of Achilles* Graves makes his aim with this prose translation quite clear: to restore the biting satire of the *Iliad*, which he felt was missing in the experience of the poem for modern readers. By Homer's time, Graves says, the High King of the Achaeans, who was a living god, had perished along with his civilisation: 'all the great cities had fallen, and the semi-barbarous princelings who camped on their ruins were ennobled by no spark of divinity'.⁴ Graves argues that it was 'these iron-age princes – descendants of the Dorian invaders who drove his own ancestors overseas – whom Homer satirises in Mycenaean disguise as Agamemnon, Nestor, Achilles, and Odysseus'. The bulk of Graves's introduction is a remarkably clear exposition of the history, source, style, even the probable modes of performance of the *Iliad*; the scholarship is as up to date as was possible in 1959, relying heavily on T. L. Webster's *From Mycenae to Homer*.⁵ But Graves emphasises most heavily his own conviction that the humour in the *Iliad* was fully intentional. 'Homer the satirist is walking on a razor's edge and must constantly affirm his adherence both to the ruling aristocracy, however stupid, cruel or hysterical, and his belief in auguries and other supernatural signs' (p. 24). Such an attitude, he argued, was

widespread; Hesiod wrote that the race of men related to the gods had been extinguished at Thebes and Troy. And such an attitude was possible because the Homeridae – the ‘sons of Homer’ – were ‘sacrosanct servants of Apollo’. They ‘could risk satire, so long as they remained serene and unsmiling throughout their performances, pointed no finger, cocked no eye, tipped no wink’ (p. 16).

In fact, Graves’s clearest, certainly most pungent explanation of his aim and his method in *Anger of Achilles* may be in an interview, ‘The Poet and the Peasant’, conducted by Kenneth Allsop in 1965. Here Graves’s emphasis is on Homer’s humour, on his distaste for war, on the mistaken reverence for the *Iliad* itself:

What has been missed is that Homer’s jokes were all deadpan. He delighted in guying terrible old bores. He had the comic dignity of the old Irish and Welsh story-tellers, and he wrapped up his jokes in archaic language – not his contemporary language at all. [. . .] Homer wasn’t a solemn old windbag, but an iconoclast with a deep sense of irony who had to wrap up his jokes about the gods and his lampooning the ancient heroes to get them by his stuffy public. He wrote satire, not pompous tragedy, an attitude that has been consistently misunderstood.⁶

Homer treated Agamemnon, Graves maintains in his introduction, with the heaviest irony. The ‘High King of Greece and Commander in Chief’ is, in *The Anger of Achilles*, ‘a weak, truculent, greedy, lying, murderous, boastful, irresolute busybody who almost always did the wrong thing’. In Book 2 Agamemnon speechifies to the assembled Greek armies, testing their morale with the suggestion that they give up the siege and retreat to Greece. The ranks of common soldiers immediately cheer his wisdom, and rush to the waiting ships, the first of several fiascos that characterise the Greeks’ strategies. In Book 4 Agamemnon is

again made ridiculous when he begins his speechifying once more, this time to Menelaus, who has been ‘transfixed [...] with an arrow’. Rather than helping Menelaus, or even sending for a surgeon, Agamemnon instead worries that Menelaus’s death might ‘set my men clamouring for home’ and embarrass him, ‘having allowed Priam’s people to make good their old boast of keeping Helen’. Agamemnon’s self-absorption here is startling:

Your bones would rot in Trojan soil and the proud Trojans capering on your tomb would scoff: ‘I pray the gods that ill-tempered Agamemnon will have no greater success in his other ventures than in this! He has sailed away empty-handed, and noble Menelaus lies here beneath our feet, his mission unaccomplished.’ Rather let the earth swallow me alive than that they should say such things! (pp. 90–91).

All Agamemnon’s attempts to encourage his commanders are inept, and only put them off. He calls a council in Book 9, for example, for no other reason than his own inability to sleep. He even wakes old Nestor, deciding that Nestor, too, must be suffering from insomnia (p. 18).

Very few of the Greek warriors escape at least subtle satire in *The Anger of Achilles*. Nestor, ‘Homer’s favourite butt after Agamemnon’, is also a constant boaster – his speech in Book 23 at Patroclus’s funeral games is priceless – and yet he is considered the wisest commander, though his advice is invariably bad. It is Nestor, for example, who encourages Agamemnon to act on the false dream and who urges Agamemnon to build the fortifications on the plain without first placating Poseidon, who is jealous of all human masonry. In a scene parallel to that between Agamemnon and Menelaus, Nestor drives Machaon back to the Greek camp for some long-winded first aid after Machaon is struck by a Trojan arrow. They ‘settle down’ for a long, lovingly-described drink, and Nestor begins another of his long reminiscences, this one of his youth at Pylus, while the arrow remains in Machaon’s

shoulder. Nestor drones on, never sending for a surgeon, and is finally interrupted by news that the Trojans have stormed the fortifications. He slowly leaves, with these parting words: 'But you are welcome to stay here and drink until Hecamede has warmed a cauldronful of water and washed the clotted blood from your wound' (p. 235).

The smallest details in Graves's translation are used to further develop this satirical attitude. When Nestor returns to the battle, he excuses himself with a false implication that he has been wounded (p. 236). Even Menelaus, who 'does not protest against Achilles's usurpation of the army command which, when Agamemnon gets wounded, should be his' is revealed as a much less-than-clear thinker (p. 23). In Book 13 Homer allows a short speech to Menelaus in which he calls the Trojans 'insatiable' in their love for war, this just before Menelaus resumes the attack which he has pressed for nine years on the city of Troy.

But Homer's tone is slightly altered, Graves argues, for Achilles, 'the real villain of the piece', who is treated 'with irony rather than humour' (p. 23). Achilles selfishly holds his Myrmidons out of battle and watches a major Trojan victory from his hut, with the Greeks being killed by the hundreds (is Achilles's anger the spite he feels for his leader Agamemnon, or the anger he feels at Patroclus's death?). Graves's translation rather consistently describes Achilles's hands as 'murderous', while Robert Fagles's 1990 translation calls them 'man killing' and Robert Fitzgerald in 1974 calls them 'deadly'.⁷ Further, Graves refers to Achilles's sacrifices to Patroclus's funeral rites as 'the holocaust'. I believe that Graves means to cast Achilles consistently in as negative a light as possible.

He is revealed, despite his assurances to the Assembly, to be a looter ('Sacker of Cities' is the preferred epithet in Graves's translation) and a seller of prisoners. Achilles is also revealed as a liar when he admits that Briseis means nothing to him. His love for Patroclus, in this translation, is revealed to be a sham: Patroclus's ghost begs for burial, but Achilles will leave his

dearest friend unburied until the Sacker of Cities can have a new set of armour made up and he can continue, in the style to which he is accustomed, his pursuit of Hector. Most damning are Achilles's denying Patroclus's request that Achilles marry Briseis – he continues after her return, Graves says in his introduction, to treat her 'as convenient bed-fellow and chattel' – and his hiding from the Council the enormous ransom Priam pays for Hector's corpse. In his battle rage, he even violates the guest-right when he kills Lycaon in Book 21. Achilles may shine with the 'hero light' on the battlefield, but Graves's translation spares him no criticism. What Graves in his introduction lightly calls irony adds up to a thoroughly negative portrait of the Greek hero.

The prose style of *The Anger of Achilles* is in constant tension with its tones, especially in the battle scenes, where the sarcasm tends to show up only in the windy speeches about the codes of honour and loot that motivate these Bronze Age princes (the rank and file are mentioned only briefly, and then usually in terms of body counts or of their quite reasonable reluctance to die). The tactics, on a large scale, tend to be very plainly communicated and explained. The weaponry is described, in Graves's prose, as much in prosaic terms of measurement as in the florid style celebrating the forge of Hephaistos. Its matter-of-fact narratives of hand-to-hand fighting and its flat descriptions of death may be the most memorable trait of the style Graves developed for *The Anger of Achilles*. Some examples:

Simoësius did not live long enough to justify the cost of his upbringing; for Great Ajax's spear pierced the lad's right breast, close to the nipple, and emerged behind the shoulder-blade (p. 97).

Peirous completed his victory with a spear-thrust below Dioures's navel; out gushed the intestines and he died (p. 98).

It cut the neck-tendon, severed the root of his tongue, and tumbled headlong, the spear-point clenched between his teeth (p. 102).

[...] hacking off his sword-arm. Death clouded Hypsenor's eyes (p. 103).

It struck Pandarus between nose and eye, penetrated his upper jaw, sliced the tongue, and emerged near the crook of his jawbone. Pandarus fell heavily to earth, and the horses sprang sideways in alarm (p. 107).

[...] severing Imbrius' head from its delicate neck, he bowled it like a ball among the fighters, to fetch up at Hector's feet (p. 221).

The spear had pierced his jaw, and lodged so fast among the roots of his teeth that, in trying to tug it free, Patroclus pulled him gaping over the rails. It was as when:

Perched on a rock with glittering hook and line
The lusty angler gaffs a fish divine (pp. 271–72).

This is Bronze Age warfare, bloody and dusty, without quarter, war motivated by hatred that gushes past death; in the looting and despoiling of corpses are the critical moments of virtually every battle.

A common assignment given students in the 1950s and early 1960s, who were reading of course other translations of the *Iliad*, was to contrast the characters of Hector and Achilles. Students labouring with the *Iliad* under what Graves calls 'the ancient classroom curse' were seldom if ever given insight into any satirical tone in the *Iliad*, but were encouraged to view Hector and Achilles as two different types of Greek hero, or two different

chronological states of the Greek idea of a hero. Woe to the sophomore with the simplistic idea that Homer was non-partisan – which is, of course, a tempting perspective for any student to adopt.

To view the *Iliad* as even-handed is tempting since Homer does in fact catalogue in flattering, genealogical detail the leaders and troops of both the Greek and Trojan armies. In the descriptions of battlefield killings, both Greek and Trojan deaths are treated relatively similarly, and the Trojans win as often as the Greeks. Though the *Iliad* ends on an ominous note for the Trojans, the epic does not narrate the fall of the city. And in those days Mary McCarthy had just translated Simone Weil's *The Iliad or the Poem of Force* (after Weil's essay was first published in *Cahiers du Sud* in 1940 and then again as an essay in the American journal *Politics*, it had finally been published in 1956 complete as a pamphlet by a Quaker press in Pennsylvania), in which Weil unforgettably summarises, 'victors and vanquished are brought equally near us; under the same head, both are seen as counterparts of the poet, and the listener as well.'⁸

The student might easily conclude that Hector was a more admirable character than Achilles, but is Hector the focus of the *Iliad*, or a mere foil to Achilles? A student might argue that the heroes of early epics, say, *Beowulf*, the *Nibelungenlied*, or the *Saga of the Volsungs*, all exhibit a character similar to that of Achilles. This early hero is generally strong and ruthless, with a lust for violence. This hero is accountable only to himself. He fights either for revenge or the more tangible result, loot. He must be loyal to friends, the possessor of physical strength, and the owner of a reputation sufficient to frighten enemies to death. Both Hector and Achilles measure up to this much of the heroic ideal; it is the degree to which civilisation seems to have affected both types of men that allows students to sense Homer's distinction between them.

The Homeridae were undoubtedly familiar with this early hero type, since they created the *Iliad* from songs that had survived the

so-called Heroic Age. They viewed the Heroic Age, however, in retrospect; at least five centuries had passed since the fall of Troy. During those centuries nomadic tribes had agriculturalised themselves into the sort of society described in Graves's introduction to *The Anger of Achilles*.

This gradual civilising process, students frequently assume, led to the second hero type, more similar to Hector's character. This later heroic type, the student might again assume, is more similar to the civilised audience for whom the Homeridae were writing. Hector would be more pleasing to these later Greeks because he exhibits his more civilised nature in several ways: he is more religious, more domestic and more a man of reason than Achilles. While similar to Graves's idea, this assumption does not allow for the satire of the Homeric audience itself, which Graves insists is central to the *Iliad*.

Students might even have argued that the development of characters with more 'civilisation' continues later into the *Odyssey*. Odysseus is certainly, they might think, more civilised than Hector; thus one can see the hero change from warrior to civil champion into a weary traveller seeking the security of home. From this declension, students might easily theorise that Hector and Odysseus are representative of the new Greek ways while Achilles, along with the other Greek tribal chiefs, represents the old ways of thinking. This too, is a reading almost Gravesian, but it is a reading which does not also partake of Graves's assumption that Homer is poking fun at his audience.

The qualities that make Hector seem more civilised are obvious throughout any translation of the *Iliad*, including even Graves's. While Achilles fights simply for the sake of fighting, Hector has a more noble purpose: he is fighting for the defence of his home. Hector is married and has a son whom he adores. Achilles's only contacts with women are his concubines, and it is representative of his nature that even they are captured from a looted city. Homer goes to great length to emphasise this aspect of character; Hector is shown with his wife and son several times in tender domestic

scenes, while Achilles's home life consists solely, if necessarily, of a tent, a campfire, and his slaves. The only thing approaching love of woman mentioned in any context with Achilles is that 'he lay in his tent with fair-cheeked Briseis'.

Another example of Hector's more balanced life is seen in his practice of religion. Hector devoutly prays daily to his gods, while Achilles's only concern with gods is a hasty pleading in battle.

Achilles and Hector differ even in the way in which each leads his men. Achilles inspires his men by his own prowess in battle; they simply follow him. If Achilles is in the field, the Myrmidons fight bravely; when Achilles withdraws from the fight, the Myrmidons withdraw also. The strength of Achilles is physical; he is not one for councils. In fact, in the opening passages we see Achilles in council, angry enough to kill Agamemnon had not a goddess stopped him.

Hector, on the other hand, seems a more democratic leader. In the Trojan council, Hector listens to suggestions from his troops before he makes a strategic decision. Hector is more democratic because he must be; he is fighting under conditions unknown to Achilles. Hector is fighting on for a cause he knows is doomed, as he admits to Andromache when he leaves for battle. He must rally his men again and again; he actually must taunt Paris into returning to battle. Hector's strength can be viewed as at least in part a moral strength, while the strength of Achilles is purely physical.

These marked contrasts between Achilles and Hector help ensure that the reader's sympathy is usually with Hector, simply because he is a more human character than Achilles. It is perilously easy to view the conflict of these two as a clash between the old and the new Greek.

This temptation is made even stronger by the paradox inherent in the heroic ideal – as once taught – that makes the hero's death the consummation of his life. If a hero must meet death in an honourable manner before he can be immortalised in the minds of his countrymen, it is important that in the *Iliad* we see no such

death for Achilles, even though his death is predicted at many points in the story. Instead, the *Iliad* ends on the tragic note of Hector's death and burial, making his fate the climax of the entire epic. The paradoxical 'happy ending' is Hector's.

Hector's final encounter with Achilles is narrated far longer than any other battlefield episode, and in most translations Hector's last moments are treated with a lofty style befitting a hero's death. Even when Hector is about to die, his essentially domestic character shows: Hector thinks of a young man and a maiden, and he remembers a sentimental scene of women washing clothes when he sees the fountains outside the wall of Troy (at least in the translation favoured for college sophomore courses in the 1950s and 1960s: that of Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf, and Ernest Van Ness Myers, which was used, for example, in G. K. Anderson and Robert Warnock's textbook anthology *The World in Literature*).⁹ Rather than plead for his life, Hector asks that Achilles send his body back to his kinsmen in Troy, so it will receive proper burial.

If the *Iliad* is the story of the anger of Achilles as the invocation declares, why does the epic continue unchanged after Achilles has revenged the death of Patroclus by killing Hector? If Achilles's anger is the story's focal point, these students usually argued, it should end with Hector dead and his corpse dishonoured, but the epic continues, to narrate Priam's recovery of the body, and the funeral. There is real concern as Hector's reputation and his fate in history hang in the balance: a dishonourable burial or the burial of a hero. Not until Hector is at last placed on the funeral pyre does the *Iliad* close.

Thus, students were tempted to conclude inaccurately that Homer, writing from a Golden Age perspective about barbaric progenitors, was half-secretly of Hector's party, just as Blake and the Romantics had concluded that Milton, whether he knew it or not, was of Satan's party. And even Graves's insistence that the Homeridae were poking fun at their listeners certainly makes it easier to assume that, in a final insulting slap at their patrons, they

had made Hector the real hero of the epic, the only character – and a Trojan at that – treated sympathetically.

In Graves's translation, Hector is the moral voice who chides Paris both for his original crime and for his malingering, in Book 3 and in Book 6. It is difficult to find any irony in Hector's domestic scenes, where he hurries himself to return to battle: 'yet I should lose my self-respect if the Trojan nobles and their womenfolk caught me malingering' (p. 130). He even swears to Ajax, in a rather courteous boast, that 'I will not take advantage of any awkwardness betrayed by your defence, but rather destroy you, if possible, in a fairer style of fighting' (p. 138). Hector, until his final betrayal by Athene, is able to clearly understand and act upon all divine messages, such as the orders from Zeus which Iris delivers in Book 11.

Though the Trojans know their cause is 'impious,' Hector is 'guardian and champion of our city', and it is, again, difficult to find in the speeches of Priam, Andromache, or Hecuba the same heavy irony which pervades and undercuts the messages in the speeches of the Greek leaders. Indeed, the tone of these Trojan scenes of mourning and foreboding might more logically be considered pathos, not the self-pity and self-aggrandising of the Greek princes. Hector faces a logical – but clear – dilemma:

If I do as my parents ask, Polydamas will blame me for having disregarded his advice. I should have listened when he begged me to lead the army home [. . .]. And some churl is bound to mutter 'Hector's vainglory was our downfall.' That I could not bear; so I must either kill Achilles, or else die gloriously. Yet, another alternative offers: to remove my helmet, lay it on the ground, lean my spear beside this shield, and meet him with a peace proposal. [. . .]
Impossible! If I went forward unarmed, Achilles would doubtless disregard the overture and fell me ruthlessly [. . .]. We must fight, and let Zeus choose between us. (p. 343)

But there is balance – or at least irony – in Hector’s battle scenes in *The Anger of Achilles*. Even when Hector is calmly awaiting the charge of Achilles, the Trojan hero is not immune from negative presentation, even being compared at one point to a serpent in ambush:

A serpent, coiled in a dank den,
That has on noxious herbage supped
Conceives a hatred of all men
(Such poisons can the soul corrupt),
And, glowering rage, resolves to lie
In ambush for a passer-by.

(p. 342)

Even as a commander-in-chief, Hector is no exemplar: Graves points out that Nestor ‘consistently gives bad advice which Agamemnon always adopts; whereas Polydamas consistently gives good advice, which Hector always rejects’ (*The Anger of Achilles*, p. 22). The most admirable aspect of Hector’s character is probably his loyalty to home, and his behaviour with family. Indeed, as Graves notes, with the exception of Priam’s rage at his other sons, ‘the domestic atmosphere in the Trojan palace is irreproachable, despite the presence of Helen, prime cause of their continued sufferings.’ And, as villainous as Achilles might be, it is worth noting that Hector’s undoing is in fact aided – villainously – by the hand of Athene:

How was he [Hector] to know that Athene had covertly pulled the famous lance from the ground and restored it to the grasp of his opponent? (p. 346)

Indeed, in Book 24 of *The Anger of Achilles* we learn – literally, in the final analysis – that Hector was most favoured by the gods. Despite all the outrages to his corpse lying unburied for twelve days, his remains are uncorrupted. Apollo argues for a proper

burial, and argues that Achilles's grief and rage should be moderated: 'He is no more capable of pity or shame than a lion among sheep – a trait which may enrich him, but which also robs him of his good name' (p. 368). When Hera objects, Zeus admits to the difference in rank between Hector and the only semi-divine Achilles: 'Yet Hector was our favourite Trojan – or at any rate mine. He never failed to propitiate me with libations, and his sacrifices always smoked at my altar' (p. 368). While Graves argues that 'Homer is utterly cynical about the Olympian gods' (p. 18), it remains telling that the last divine intervention in *The Anger of Achilles* is to allow the retrieval of Hector's corpse.

Perhaps because he used poetic form for only a few pieces of the epic – 'I have therefore followed the example of the ancient Irish and Welsh bards by, as it were, taking up my harp and singing only where prose will not suffice' (p. 35) – few of Graves's prayers, dirges, or country songs worked into similes have been taken seriously as poems. The single exception I have identified is, interestingly enough, the poem on Hector's death in Book 22. Patrick Keane in *A Wild Civility* notes the similarity of that pro-Trojan poem to 'The Destroyers' and traces its rhythms to Blake's 'The Tyger'.¹⁰ In fact, I would add that in *The Anger of Achilles*, with Graves's simile comparing Hector to the light of Hesperus (p. 346), the women's dirge for Hector (p. 349), and continuing into Book 24, the incidental lyrics begin to ring changes on the rhythms of 'The Tyger' and become more genuinely complete poems in their own right. Beginning with Priam's prayer for guidance (p. 373) and culminating in the three dirges of Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen, these poems are more capable of standing alone than are any other of the lyrics in *The Anger of Achilles*. Andromache's dirge is stark in its self-pity, while Hecuba's dirge calls Hector 'of all my children / Far closest to this heart / And loved by the Immortals' (p. 382). Helen's dirge paints Hector as most fully human of the *Iliad*'s heroes:

Of all the princes in this land

None other so befriended me
As Hector: he could understand
How much I suffered, only he. [. . .]

But not a word
Harsh or unkind did Hector say [. . .].

But Hector my ill cause would plead
And gently chide their obloquy.

Here, of his generous heart bereft,
Let me make wail and cry Alas [. . .].
(p. 383)

The 1960 Foyle Poetry Award was awarded to Graves for both the *Collected Poems 1959* and *The Anger of Achilles*. In 1964 Graves won another prize, the Prix d'Italia, for a radio script made from 'his *Iliad*'. As *The Anger of Achilles*, it sold almost 18,000 copies in hardback, and even more in the American paperback. Seymour-Smith says 'it has not lasted' and implies that it may never have sold well simply because 'some of the classical scholars did not like it'. For example, one Homeric scholar – Adam Parry, whom Seymour-Smith rather dismissively identifies merely as 'the son of the great American Homeric scholar Milman Parry' – said that *The Anger of Achilles* was 'unworthy of a man of letters' and could not be satisfied with Graves's assertion that the translation was 'intended for a hypothetical proletarian audience (surely a romantic notion)' (Seymour-Smith, p. 488).

Graves's unorthodox view of the Trojan War literature was a view he had long held. After all, he had edited, reworked, and even revised for dramatisation Laura Riding's *A Trojan Ending* in the mid-1930s. And in 1955 he had advanced in *The Greek Myths* very much the same argument he advances in *The Anger of Achilles*. In his notes to *The Greek Myths* Graves says:

Yet the quarrels are so unedifying, and all the Greek leaders behave so murderously, deceitfully, and shamelessly, while the Trojans by contrast behave so well, that it is obvious on whose side the author's sympathy lay. [. . .] Apollo and Artemis must support the Trojans and display dignity and discretion, in contrast at least with the vicious deities of the Hellenic camp.¹¹

In fact, satire of the Olympian religion is so blatant, Graves argues, the *Iliad* had a hand in devaluing the Olympians so that 'no one ever again took the Olympian religion seriously, and Greek morals remained barbarous' (*The Greek Myths*, p. 312). Of Homer's role in this devaluing, Graves says:

One would dismiss him as an irreligious wretch, were he not clearly a secret worshipper of the Great Goddess of Asia (whom the Greeks had humiliated in this war); and did not glints of his warm and honourable nature appear whenever he is describing family life in Priam's palace (p. 312).

This series of notes in *The Greek Myths* is worth careful study: it is the seed of Graves's translation of the *Iliad*. Was Graves of the 'Party of Hector'? The answer is yes; he makes Hector the hero of *The Anger of Achilles*, however satirised he might be, for the same reason he claims that Homer makes Hector the hero of the *Iliad*: simply put, Hector champions the goddess culture against the barbarians.

Illinois State University

NOTES

¹ Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves: His Life and Work* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 467.

² Graves Collection, Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

³ Anonymous, 'Olympian Satire', *Time*, 9 November 1959, p. 107.

⁴ Robert Graves, *The Anger of Achilles* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959), p. 16.

⁵ T. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer* (London: Methuen, 1958).

⁶ Kenneth Allsop, 'The Poet and the Peasant', in *Conversations with Robert Graves*, ed. by Frank Kersnowski (London: University of Mississippi Press, 1989), p. 70.

⁷ Robert Fagles, *The Iliad* (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1990); Robert Fitzgerald, *The Iliad* (New York: Doubleday, 1974).

⁸ Simone Weil, *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*, trans. by Mary McCarthy (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Pamphlets, 1956), p. 30.

⁹ Andrew Lang, Walter Leaf, Ernest Myers, *The Iliad of Homer* (London: Macmillan, 1883); G. K. Anderson and Robert Warnock, *The World in Literature* (New York: Scott Foresman, 1950).

¹⁰ Patrick Keane, *A Wild Civility* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), pp. 57–60, and p.108, n. 54.

¹¹ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Penguin, 1955), pp. 311–12.