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The Uses of Apocalypse

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Abstract

This project aims to answer a creative question: what use might be made of the traditions of apocalyptic literature in writing about catastrophe? This is addressed from two angles: a creative project, *Peripheral Visions*, and *A New Cave Flooded To Light*, a critical study of W. S. Graham.

Peripheral Visions uses the apocalyptic genre as a framework for poems about the catastrophe of dementia. *A New Cave Flooded To Light*, explores how Graham might be understood as an apocalyptic poet; what this contributes to understandings of his work and of the genre; and what reading him through this lens contributes to this project as a whole.

Apocalyptic literature evokes the revelation, through a process of catastrophe and judgement, of an otherwise hidden alternative to the status quo. Over time it has lost its relationship to a shared vision of eschatology and to the promise of rescue from a critical situation. Nonetheless, it remains distinguished by narrative themes of catastrophe, judgment and renewal (or an altered perception of reality). Both elements of this project are structured around those three themes and deploy the apocalyptic devices of a non-linear treatment of time, visions and dreams, transformative journeys, myth, and image.

A sense of language as a supernatural element, and of its 'dark companion', silence, also runs through both elements. In their anxiety about the

instability of language and its implications for authenticity, they demonstrate apocalypse as a literary event.

Traditionally, apocalypse implies positive change. In *Peripheral Visions,* however, the struggle is against change itself, and is demonstrably unsuccessful. Many of the poems, notably 'from Bugarach' and 'Occipital Outcome', share with those in Graham's *Malcolm Mooney's Land* and with 'Implements In Their Places' a resistance to revelation as renewal. This study argues that Graham, nonetheless, also posits a 'life after death' for the poet in a continual 'making new'.

Using the apocalyptic device of vision, *Peripheral Visions* moves ever further from 'normal' perception to create the vision of dementia, questioning, too, the assumption that such a vision is invalid.

Apocalypse operates in the imagination. Graham's deteriorating relationship with the Muse, the personification of imagination, coincides with the increasing negativity of his apocalyptic vision. In its discussion of this, and of the influence of Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, the critical element of this project offers new perspectives on Graham's later work.

Graham's poetry has not, however, lost the moral tone of the genre. In surfacing his treatment of the paradoxical 'lie' at the heart of artistic 'truth', this study links his work to medieval 'dream' poems, as well as asking serious questions about readings of 'Implements In Their Places'.

This project demonstrates how the apocalyptic genre's preoccupation with the cataclysmic end of one version of reality and the imposition of another equates to the process of dementia. It demonstrates, too, W. S. Graham's response to the genre's visionary treatment of judgement, catastrophe and renewal, and its reciprocal understanding of time, which equates to poetic simultaneity.

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Part 2: *A New Cave Flooded To Light***:**

W. S. Graham as an apocalyptic poet

Notes

1. References to poems in *W. S. Graham: New Collected Poems* are given in brackets as (NCP …). I have followed W. S. Graham's practice of capital letters for each word in the title of his poems. Graham normally uses M for Muse; I have done the same.

2. Where the title of a poem is the same as that of the collection in which it appears, it is given in inverted commas; the title of the collection is italicised. Thus, 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' is the title of the poem; *Malcolm Mooney's Land* is the title of the collection.

3. This is a creative project. Extracts from *Peripheral Visions* introduce the chapters from page 92 onward. This intended to link creative and academic aspects of the work.

4. 'from Bugarach': This sequence takes as a point of reference the pilgrimage of esoterics to the Pic de Bugarach in 2012. The Pic is a 1,230 metres mountain peak and the highest summit in the Corbières mountains. The peak is also called the 'upside down mountain' as the top layers of rock are older than the lower layers due to uplift of the Pyranees. Based on an interpretation of the Mayan calender which claimed a planet on a crash course with Earth would impact on 21 December 2012, Bugarach was believed by doomsday cults to be the only place in the world which would survive Armageddon. According to prophecy, aliens would emerge from

their 'spaceship garage' in the Pic and pluck believers to safety. As it turned out, nothing happened.

THE USES OF APOCALYPSE

An Introduction to the Project

i Aims and approaches

This project aims to answer a practical creative question: what use might be made of the traditions of apocalyptic literature in an attempt to write about catastrophe?

The question is addressed from two angles. The first is *Peripheral Visions*, a collection of seven sequences of seven poems which draws on the traditional apocalyptic genre as a framework for writing about the catastrophe of dementia. The unstable world of dementia can also be seen as an analogy for the breakdown of belief in the apocalyptic narrative as the promise of positive change.

The second is *A New Cave Flooded To Light*, a critical study of W. S. Graham which considers him as an apocalyptic poet. This explores why and how Graham might be understood as such; what this contributes to our understanding of his work and of the genre; and what reading him through an apocalyptic lens contributes to this project as a whole.

ii *Peripheral Visions*: why apocalyptic literature?

The catastrophe which drives the creative element of this project is the loss of self, due to the instability of language and to the incommunicable alterations of perception resulting from dementia.   The business of apocalyptic writing is the often cataclysmic end of one version of reality and the imposition of another, and in this it echoes the process and powerlessness of dementia. The genre invites, too, an imaginative treatment of themes of judgement, catastrophe and renewal which characterise 'last days', depicted in these poems variously as the end of a once-familiar world, the end of an individual's life, and/or the end of planet earth.

Apocalyptic writing is also driven by a reciprocal relationship of past, present and future time which equates to poetic simultaneity as well as to dementia's distortion of temporal meaning. And it opens up the transformative experience of dreams and visions, giving access to the alternative, and unreliable, reality experienced in dementia and thus raising the question of credibility which is essential to the success of the genre.

By way of context, Chapter 2 identifies some relevant aspects of apocalyptic literature, noting the loss of the hope traditionally associated with it, and the secularisation of the genre. Shaken out of their theological shell, the essential elements continue nonetheless to be catastrophe, judgment and renewal, revealed in language which makes use of a characteristic range of narrative devices. These are listed on page 100.

Almost all can be traced in the work of W. S. Graham. *Peripheral Visions* draws particularly on those associated with time, vision, and journeys of transformation.

The poems are composed in sequences, in short lines for the most part, and often in words of one syllable, representing the ticking of time, in the spaces between which meaning is in jeopardy. Time starts to part company with meaning, however, in the fifth and seventh sequences, 'Occipital Outcome' and 'from Bugarach'. The former achieves simultaneity, the reciprocity of time which characterises apocalyptic literature, through the device of memory captured on a reel to reel home movie, which can wind – and be wound - backwards as well as forwards. The latter is fundamentally concerned with reaching, making present, a future deadline beyond which time will, it is believed, end. In the event, true to Biblical precedent, it does not. Here the poem diverges from Biblical precedent, which, reinforced by faith in the supernatural character of the event, leaves the promise where, by definition, it belongs: in the future. In 'from Bugarach' the poem turns back to the evocation of a memory; memory achieves the end of the world, transforming the present and giving eternal presence to the past.

As the title implies, the visionary element is essential to *Peripheral Visions* and is played out in the often filmic emphasis on seeing, blindness and altered perception. Here the apocalyptic paradigm undergoes an ironic twist. Conforming to the meaning of 'apocalypse', the collection as a whole is the revelation of an alternative reality. Instead of providing an escape

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from catastrophe, however, the new world of dementia is founded on an ever-increasing distortion of 'normal' vision. The ability of the lyric to bring the reader into the experience on the page, however, also normalises these distortions, raising questions about the authenticity of differing versions of lived reality. Nonetheless, in these poems the principal concern is with apocalypse as catastrophe, in the transformation of words, signifiers on the page whose significance is in retreat. Meaning cannot be taken at face value, and this, as 'Occipital Outcome' aims to show, renders the action of judgement itself unreliable.

iii Creative issues

Transformation is fundamental both to dementia and to apocalypse. Accordingly, the original creative intention of this project was to transform, by 'translating' or re-visioning, the Biblical *Book of Revelation*, making it a metaphor for the 'end times' of the sufferer. *Peripheral Visions* does still make some, limited, use of the Biblical structure. These are reflected in the structure of the collection and reappear too in the sequencing of the critical study of W. S. Graham.

The Biblical imagery, which is hugely powerful in context, proved, however, impossible to reimagine outside the realm of dystopian fiction. At the other extreme, an attempt to deploy the cooler discourse of systematic theology resulted only in a short collection, *The Eschalator*, which never moved beyond the intellect. Those poems were based on the

2012-13 Stanton Lectures given in Cambridge by Professor Paul Griffiths, Warren Professor of Catholic Theology, Duke Divinity School.[1] The lectures addressed:

The Grammar of the End

 The End of Time

The End of Persons

The End of Experience

The End of the Flesh

The End of the Sacraments

The End of the Angels

The End of Nonhuman Animals

The Eschalator is appended, to illustrate that stage in the practical development of this project. *Peripheral Visions*, the collection presented here, incorporates material from it, but with considerable differences in tone and context.

These attempts to call on traditional ways of writing about apocalypse exposed a cultural problem which affects apocalyptic writing fundamentally. Unlike Biblical or theological models, they could not call on a shared core of belief, expressed in a familiar form and employing

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[1] The full text can be found at https//sms.cam.ac.uk/collection 1393224

symbols and allusions which the audience or readership would recognise, understand, and accept.

Equally problematic was the fact that apocalypse, in its strict meaning of 'revelation', has traditionally carried a positive as well as a negative charge. The revelation is of change as a way out of a critical situation, at least for the chosen few. In *Peripheral Visions,* however, the struggle is against change itself: time, space and sensation slip out of control, memory unwinds, rewinds and plays again and again like a film in a nightmare, and the hope of a way out has to be abandoned. As noted above, the poems are about 'seeing' and the vision is indeed the experience of a new reality, but it is to be resisted, not desired. It is, moreover, adrift in the imagination and the 'visionary' is unable to communicate it. Mirroring the breakdown of a community of belief, the apocalyptic revelation is locked within the individual. This is an important theme, too, in Graham's work, which reflects the importance to him of belonging and of community.

The themes of isolation and communication opened up for examination another significant aspect of apocalyptic writing. If the revelation has become individual and, often, intellectual, what has happened to the 'political' role of the poet as seer or prophet? In a situation characterised by instability, what is the status of the 'message' or the moral judgement? How far can the poet speak for the 'subject'? And are the two voices always the same? Inevitably, both authenticity and authority are undermined. In

this, too, *Peripheral Visions* shares a common theme with Graham (see in particular the discussion in Chapter 5).

In *Peripheral Visions* there are several voices and vantage points. Like the New Testament 'Book of Revelation', the work opens with seven 'letters'. These, similarly, foreshadow the catastrophe to come. 'Correspondence', the title of the sequence, is ironic: the 'correspondence' of word and meaning essential to communication is diminishing. The dementia sufferer is being addressed in words on the very elusiveness of the Word.

In 'Sightlines', the second sequence, the relationship with words becomes more directly problematic, the authenticity of 'sight' starts to slip and the authority of the external voice is thrown off course by the 'subject's' attempts to connect. Ambivalence becomes more pronounced as perception slips and slides between external and internal.

'Seven Peripheral Visions', which follows, draws on apocalyptic precedent by taking the reader into the vision of the 'protagonist'. Here, particulars of the quotidian assume the expanded but elusive significance of details in a dream. It is no vision of paradise, however. The sufferer withdraws into a catastrophic isolation of dreams, visions and distortions which are punctuated by residual details from 'normal' life. In 'Cloud Chamber', as the title suggests, those residual details have gone and it is only by letting words sit by themselves on the page that the tricky logic of words and

meaning in dementia can emerge. The question is, does that logic have its own validity?

In the sequences which follow, the voice of the sufferer is increasingly denied or over-ridden. 'Occipital Outcome' uses the device of a reel-to-reel projection to express the estrangement of the dementia sufferer from 'normal' experience and the format also brings in the theme of memory, constantly overlaid and relayed by the two voices. 'Occipital Outcome' is primarily concerned, however, with catastrophe and judgement. Catastrophe takes place on several levels in the 'narrative' itself, and in its expression on the page in disjunction and broken lines of communication.

The poem is in two columns, simulating the sound track bordering the visual material on a reel of film. The voices interact, but the 'subject' speaks, on the whole, from the column on the left, and the 'judge' from the right. The text is, however, intended to be read across the columns, as well as vertically, giving the reader a simultaneous experience of judgement and catastrophe, spinning backwards and forwards across and through a life in vision and sound, story and commentary, as the reels unwind and rewind. The gap between the two voices on the page represents annihilation, the catastrophe of silence, the chasm of nothing over which Graham tries to keep his balance.[2] But the aim here is also to engage with the apocalyptic theme of judgement by introducing an 'other', a presence, which might be

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[2] *The Nightfisherman: Selected Letters of W. S. Graham*, ed. by Michael and Margaret Snow (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1999), p. 230; hereafter *Nightfisherman.*

fate, or some superhuman power, or indeed, the poet, but which also represents the protagonist's consciousness of their own struggle with interpretation. This power operates the projector, speaks across and over the subjective narrative, and, ultimately, simply rewinds the tape, imprisoning the 'self' in its own catastrophe.

In the penultimate sequence, 'Second Sight', it is the poet, as a very limited 'seer', who tries to make imaginary connections with the dementia sufferer, who is now in an alien world. The sequence deals with absence, and the paradox of the continuing presence, in the words of the poet, of the person who is now lost. This theme is also very present in Graham's elegies and is discussed below in relation to 'The Thermal Stair'.

The final sequence, 'from Bugarach' operates as an allegory of the subject's experience of 'end times'. It consists of an apocalyptic journey to the famous Pic de Bugarach, to await the end of the world and the promise of salvation. This was a real news event,[3] and the narrative, 'the interval of dying',[4] is purposely narrated by a voice which is not that of the patient. The use of a 'real' event and an external voice emphasises the isolation of the sufferer, who is neither able nor allowed to tell his or her tale.

Like Graham's 'Implement' number 73 (NCP 257), in which the wrong god descends, out of season, this poem finally confronts the disaster, which also

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[3] See my Note 4 pp. 10, 11
[4] Kevin Hart, *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 9.

expresses judgement: the promise is withheld; the messiah never comes. Memory remains, however. In this case, the memory is of a Sunday evening cycle ride along a slow canal. The image evokes nostalgia, both for the past and for the future which does not come. As noted above, it also impregnates the present situation with memory, thereby suggesting that all connection is not lost.

iv Why W. S. Graham?

W. S. Graham would not have described himself as an apocalyptic writer, in part, because that would have implied a closer alignment with the 'New Apocalyptics' than he looked for. Although he shared some of their concerns, his hero was Eliot and his use of image, myth, and techniques of simultaneity, together with his commitment to poetry as a process of 'making new', owe much to Modernism. This study argues that, far from undermining the apocalyptic in his work, this perspective is intrinsic to it.

The chapters below discuss Graham's work in relation to the characteristic themes and elements in apocalyptic writing identified in Chapter 1. They focus in particular on the apocalyptic dream (Chapter 3), apocalyptic journeys, language and the problem of home (Chapter 4), catastrophe and judgement (Chapter 5), revelation and renewal (Chapter 6) and the negative apocalypse (Chapter 7). Many of these themes can be traced throughout his work, but, while taking account of earlier poems, this study focuses on Graham's two later collections, *Malcolm Mooney's Land* and *Implements In*

Their Places, paying particular attention to poems selected for what they reveal of his engagement with the themes of catastrophe and judgement.

Graham's apocalypse is more than a check-list of characteristics. The poem itself is an apocalyptic event. This is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' (NCP 153) in particular reveals his apparent failure to achieve his primary aim, expressed in *Notes On A Poetry Of Release,* of releasing the reader into a new world, or at least making a beneficial addition to an existing one.[5] Anticipating the withdrawal into abstraction in 'The Constructed Space' (NCP 161), the poem, with its words which freeze on the page, leaves the poet no option but, in his own words, to make himself alone. Despite this definitive isolation, 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', like much of Graham's work, is populated by literary figures and other heroes whose presence provides an implicit commentary, or judgement, on the poet himself. For Graham, this literary community included not only the writers he admired, but the ghostly cohort of priestly poets whose significance and sources are synthesised in Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*. While it has frequently been argued[6] that Graham was driven by a sense of exile from the Clydeside community which he abandoned to become a poet, this study suggests that his longing for

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[5] W. S. Graham, 'Notes On A Poetry Of Release', in *Poetry Scotland* , 3 (July 1946), pp. 99-100. Reprinted in *The Nightfisherman: Selected Letters of W. S. Graham*, ed. by Michael and Margaret Snow (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1999), pp. 379 – 83 (p. 381); hereafter *Notes*.

[6] See e.g. Matthew Francis, *Where The People Are: Language and Community in the Poetry of W.S. Graham*, (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2004), pp. 43, 45; hereafter *Where The People Are*.

inclusion in the community of literature emerges at least as strongly, in allusions, quotes and name-checks throughout his work.

By way of context Chapter 2 considers relevant influences on Graham. In addition to the New Apocalyptics and Modernism, these include the role of Surrealism and the place of the Absurd in Graham's quest for authenticity. The influence of *The White Goddess* also permeates his work, particularly in the presence of the Muse, who can be seen as the 'wild goddess', with her complex of attributes as the incarnation of poetry, truth and life itself. Graham's deteriorating relationship with her as the personification of imagination is particularly relevant to the alteration over time of his understanding of apocalypse. This moves from his early, optimistic, assertion that:

> The poem itself is dumb but has the power of release. Its purpose is that it can be used by the reader to find out something about himself.[7]

to the final debacle which closes 'Implements In Their Places'[8] (NCP 257), and is particularly poignant in 'Five Visitors To Madron' (NCP 188) and 'The Lying Dear' (NCP 158). This study suggests in Chapter 7 that the influence of the Goddess on 'Implements' has been underestimated by

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[7] *Notes*, p. 381.
[8] Hereafter referred to as 'Implements' in both text and references. The collection is referred to as *Implements*.

commentators and that, when taken into account, it contributes to a new understanding of the poem.

Graham's relationship with the Muse also dramatises the paradoxical relationship between artifice, the apparent opposite of authenticity, and the poem as a privileged point of access to a hidden truth. In doing so, it contributes a moral dimension which is typical of the genre. Graham's references to 'falling' have caused commentators to deduce that he sees his desertion of home, family, and community as a sin which cuts him off from Eden.[9] In this study I use 'truth' to mean 'the unhidden', a meaning ascribed by Plato to Heraclitus and explained by Heidegger in his lectures on *'The Essence of Truth.*[10] A case can be made for seeing his 'sin' as the essential lie of art. This study cites in support the contrasting juxtaposition of the falls in 'The Night City' (NCP 215) and 'Enter A Cloud' (NCP 216) against the medieval and Shakespearean dream sequences to which Graham alludes in them.

The tension between 'truth' and 'art' is a recurring theme in Graham's work, and was a preoccupation also of the artists who were his companions. In this study it is discussed in particular in Chapter 3, in relation to 'Enter A Cloud' and in Chapter 5 with respect to the poems in *Malcolm Mooney's Land*, and 'The Lying Dear' in particular.

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[9] See, for example, *Where The People Are,* pp. 43 and 45.
[10] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth: On Plato's Cave Allegory and Theaetetus,* trans. by Ted Sadler (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 10. Hereafter *The Essence of Truth*.

This study identifies factors which support the argument for reading W. S. Graham's work through an apocalyptic lens. The over-riding reason for selecting him as a subject was, however, that while his poetry very often discloses a dystopian reality, he continues to commit himself to making the marks on the page, each of which changes the world. Language is revealed as unstable, silence as hostile; the poet's very self is threatened, but, despite the peril of the process, there is no doubt about the transformative power of each new word, each time it is 'brought to life'.[11]

v Research challenges

Research for this project faced two challenges in particular. The first was that the subject of 'apocalypse' has generated a very wide range of treatments, visual, musical and literary, and a very considerable amount of commentary. As the bibliography indicates, research focused on the following areas:

a) Theological background and critical discussion of the genre's development. Of prime importance were:

- The New Testament *Book of Revelation* and commentaries on it as literature;
- Contemporary theological discussion of eschatology, revelation and salvation and particularly the 2012-13 Stanton lectures at the University of Cambridge.

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[11] *Notes*, p. 380. See also 'The Thermal Stair' (NCP 163).

b) Philosophical and related themes such as concepts of being, time and 'endings', particularly in the work of Heidegger, Kermode and Agamben.

c) Significant critical and creative approaches to apocalyptic themes, including, among many, *Pearl* and *Piers Plowman*, Dante, Milton, Blake, the Romantics, Yeats, Hopkins, Rimbaud, Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, Beckett, David Jones, the New Apocalyptics, Dylan Thomas, Paul Celan and J. H. Prynne.

While it was essential to achieve an understanding of the character of the genre and of trends in its development, these could not, however, become the subject of the project itself. Chapter 2 therefore offers only a brief summary of relevant themes.

The second challenge was that the work of W. S. Graham has, until recently, attracted comparatively little scholarly attention. This study references in particular the very detailed work of Tony Lopez and Matthew Francis, and *The Nightfisherman*, the selection of Graham's letters edited by Michael and Margaret Snow. Further works consulted are listed in the Bibliography, and include recent publications to mark the centenary of Graham's birth. This study began to take shape some time earlier and focusses on poems selected from Graham's published works. Nonetheless, the insights into Graham's poetic process in recent publications to mark the

centenary of his birth, notably the special edition of the *Chicago Review,*[12] have proved valuable in shedding light on Graham's notebooks and drafts.

Graham's own sources are wide, ranging from Heraclitus to Heidegger, Fridtjof Nansen to Robert Graves, and include the visual artists amongst whom he lived and the many poets and writers with whose work he was familiar. Those works which contributed significantly as sources for this study are listed in the Bibliography.

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[12] *Chicago Review*, Winter 2018, Vol. 62, Issue 1-3. Hereafter *Chicago Review*

The Uses of Apocalypse

Part 1

PERIPHERAL VISIONS

'Have I not been trying to use the obstacle

Of language well?'

W. S. Graham, 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' 4

(NCP 155)

Correspondence

1.

If only

the words stopped turning

the insides out of the moment

pencil-clenched

drawing a hard line

round hoarded hurts, recorded scorns

close pressed thorns

pulled down

inside your helmet

2.

You are nervous around words

like thoroughbreds

breasting heaven, tension sprung

 letters prancing down the soul

to blasphemy

scattering like mercury

on the tip

of the tongue

drift words unhinged flopdowns homeless drop outs

3.

Words escape into the crowd

behind the lines eyes down

before the naked truth

couldn't lay a finger on the pulse

such running dogs.

And now they're slinking back to fill the blanks,

sidling out of shadows

handing out scribbled invitations

to the past

behind your eyes

4.

Fan fall shuffle letters

sifted into little cones exposed along a ledge

in solitary confinement.

Dead end

the end to come to the end

of the word

if the charioteer swings down

if the charioteer fails to

you jump, reach

out of time

lost for words

5.

Take aim

je t'aime

one in the blind eye of Eros.

We don't allow

sharp tipped darts.

Our words have rubber suction lips.

They'll slip if you don't lick them.

6.

Dies irae dearie

the lachrymosa's out along the hill

white stones roll to the touch every

venerable word in the wall

gone to pieces, rendered out liars

this is not a place

to meet the eye

7.

OK, you can read over my shoulder and

buddy when you call me you can call me

you think

that we should strew a few more flowers about,

memories are made of this?

This is too hard. Speak directly

into the microphone, sometimes

good enough is good enough no

more journeys into barely audible under

tones feather one place, one nerve, longing

ago it doesn't matter it

really doesn't matter lie

along the length this waste

of time

Sightlines

1.

Lighthouses are blind. They have glass eyes

which pick off mariners who stray.

Blind Alexander Mitchell built the light on Maplin Sands.

The blind man saw.

Had he thought it through before

he insisted on a miracle?

Did he have to close his eyes

again to find the way back home?

2.

Poor mind

bent by careless resurrection

men round spaces sprung apart

at the touch of an eye

inference tips down

chutes of memory or

then again

may simply be forgotten

ladder tracks each ten

or so they go

tickety under the belt

nearer the drop

off point

the proverbial rabbit in the head

lights on moth dust

3.

The blind man in the basement

scissorhands along the seams

eviscerates the voice box

boiled sweet eyes and plush.

Limp beloved never

never

never patted dry your eyes

reached out to have and to hold

bird bones, opalescent nails,

broken wires trailing tracing

touch paper blue moon hands

4.

Across the day

behind closed eyes

you tap a pencil tattoo on your knee

to a girl

in a checked dress

tight waist full skirt full flirt, full flight.

Out of sight,

two cordoned apple trees

hold hands along a path

and put an arm round each other

when the wind blows

they link arms and dance

on the spot

their fruit is small and neat.

5.

Touch and go blind

man's buff grandmother's footsteps

what's the time?

didn't they ring for a taxi?

what is the name of this street?

have all the people closed for the night?

     Without a stick one must eventually

kick aside the pigeons and sit with nothing

to lean against.

     Is this space vacant? libero?

     Libera me

6.

The Disney dream of Carcassone drawn

across with sunset troubadours

pennants on lances

and ladies in veils

these are a few of your favourite kings

and queens jointly and severally silent

come right up to the edge of your skin

eyes right

past is just

a figure of speech we all know

what lies over the edge, not oblivion

but bottled myths

in rows backlit tableaux enlivened

by sound effects.

7.

From the air these stripes of garden,

in an angel's eye,

have all the attributes of Eden,

sliced up, laid out.

An angel passes over.

It's ok it's one of ours.

Sliding out the doll's house drawers

of match boxes you pick some

likely looking brands and strike

up a Lucifer

for the hell of it

Seven Peripheral Visions

1.

Light hesitates

catches

on some hair-line

chasm in the dial

Nine curled bee carcases

with tidy folded feet

rest in their own shadows on the floor

just outside the corner

of my mind

at the back of my eye

some projection of little names

lights polished corridors

beads scattering

taste one word or another, try

to hook back

down biography's swan throat

the savour of corroborative event

on the chewed sea wall ledge

of the dump at the base

of the hippocampus[13]

signifiers stumble on dead memory dunes

dune grass cuts like paper

over the cracks but losing

the sentence is

exile to alien inter-cranial space

where mis-assembled memories march past

without a glance

2.

White days like double cataracts.

In my lightbox see the pictures floating

now there we are as we were and ever shall be.

Hollows for my hand all

swung around the neck of time all

hallows stringing through reception room after withdrawing

room for living

space and then

again the garden

in shades of grey and light.

Someone has ironed the ribbons

in the children's hair and told them

to stand still under a greengage tree.

The dog is just about to run

out of the frame.

It's lying low, the sun,

shooting horizontal rays from just behind the hill through ranks

of trees stamped on the sky

peeling at the edges

of peripheral vision.

Wires snap singly

curling back in spirals on themselves maybe

one or two a second not

all at once but just enough to craze the footage

spooling past the eyelight

3.

Mementos start to slide off occasional tables

light switches hand holds

alternative immanence

kindness and the birds in the beech hedge

furnishing essential classics

still the same

weather. Just

the usual sunlight

just for now

this little soldier marches round and round

bent stiff within the ramparts, never

touching the sides

4.

This is the fog end the

plastic flap in the face

the crawl space

no-one comes

troubling the sediment

for missing keys

better to be glove handled soft

patience child spoken left

to play with the tangled plumb line

an empty sack

slumped in a red armchair with

nothing to say on the phone

5.

Now this space is Sunday.

     My inner eyes crack open to a tender pink

     like the silk lining of a little monkey's unfurled palm.

     Breath light,

     bruised by a hint of cloud

     seared by the flash-past

     of a bird.

So sharp, the wings breaking

against my turn the other cheek.

6.

 third step sprung

and falling

way off mouthing time

refracted

on a rag stopped Christo billow

glimpsed through

a crack in the

surface stones skim lights

off the water falls

more slowly through

the folded corners of a soft rectangle

7.

Here we are.

We are hoping to live

up to their expectations we need still

to learn to be and not to be.

This window will not open.

The catch is a curled snail,

maybe a worm cast

on the beach remember the first time

we saw the sea it was raining

and the sky disappeared.

So we must not open the window.

Cloud chamber

1.

The first things is to buy a telescope

    so as to be sure

    you're gazing at the right star

    the right planet

    the red planet

    angry ice

    bruises pulping to extinction.

    Developing technology suggests that some of us should

    be able to survive there, one maybe

    two at a time arriving when the planets align

    correctly. Such a trajectory only

    happens once a year.

2.

Husks maybe, but no

matches found with any names of

saints, heroes, virtues, virgins, martyrs,

seasons, flora, fauna, sites of interest

Batch of the day

labelled, delivered with

no allowance for extra time

just one afternoon

of loaded rain without a hat

3.

They used to send instructions through the post

you'll get 3 minutes

so

stair cupboard or

cellar if you have one or

need to house the hoover

somewhere.

4.

I'm

singing in the rain

I'm taking my clothes off

what you want to sing that for?

happy birthday to you?

hallo chickallili

baah baa rainbow sheep

remember to tie a knot in your pyjamas

and chocolate sprinkles today please

And

every

day

5.

Ace King Queen Jack racing demons down

the track how far is it to babble on?

Lead us not into atemporality

a word in time saves

if you put it in flash we can't odds it

so lead blinding light but

let us dreft the sand through

tepid te dium

the needle flickers but n n no

north it seems is

over

6.

It's been a fallow winter shall we have

a ball?

push pull evacuated toggle switches

all the stops are out

cocked up for the rush

of emphasis

in one fell swoop across the great

divide no

resistance was encountered

in the cloud chamber

7.

I shall come back

tick tapping a martial cane

tripping

through scar tissue

bandages flicking

the lids of ladies

heel toe tapping their flat-souls

through time parcelled

like books

between their eyes.

Occcipital outcome

Creased grey ghost

child from the flickering grisaille

static almost call-words

retrograde interference past

untouchable you cannot

finger dirty dust motes

the end whips

fast and loose

whichever way you look at it

in the beginning surely no

identity parade

Hand spin reel to reel and

quick step forward-

facing people backwards,

bring down blown kisses,

pull out of love,

gobble protestations,

the hand that rocks the reel

mixes the tenses,

until there you are.

occipital outcome.

the end.

the opening shot.

Reel 1

From up here on the terrace

the eye takes in

a cockshift combine

harvester aided by hillside

levelling

technology and bale deflectors

string-tied tramps close up   slicing decreasing squares

 growling bottle mouths   down to spiteful stubble.

dirty sacking finger

prints slip on the wet lips   Red riding hood trips into the

of words I know the names   wood

of the days whisper   all on a summer's day.

Monday Tuesday Wednesday   See how she runs!

full of woe

                                           Put a hand halt on the reel

Wednesday, Tuesday,   reverse step?

Monday fair of face value   It's your projection.

                                           You slip in through my eyes.

                                           Dragging a velvet cloak

                                           that's years too big

Reel 2

Mr Sandeman checks under the

bed

for lies

stands sideways to the window

drops his cloak

I dreamed

I swallowed an open safety pin   The red queen hugs her Spartan

fox

places schools of teddy bears

fingers on lips make a lion what is   against iron bedstead bars.

a composition paint a whale why

paint a robin-burnt-breast

there are hedgehogs in the bonfire

rest, we wish them rest

because it is a little bed

we lay them in and rake

the covers over, tuck

the edges in.

Reel 3

Now see her in the distance

hi-ho, hi-ho, hi-ho   looking on the bright side

the little boat sails

shine a light shake a leg

In the string time, the merry

a bundle of belongings

merry string time   shouldered on a stick

when the dolphins sing and the

albatross

wings outstretched slip-streams storm-

smash champagne phosphorous

over the bridge not dying, never dying

down the old green trough

which cracks thank God before

the reel

turns turtle

Pretty on the water, here. Boats.

So much summer.

Sue and Babs in swim suits plash

into out of pink purled pleasures   early technicolour dream boats

strike out after elusive Lilos.   lovely to see you young again

such vivacious ectoplasm

powered by artificial respiration

shrieking back before the waves

Incandescence on the tongue   wet

beneath pandanus trees

touching such delectable desire   the grateful natives sit

with blow pipes at their lips

puffing dreams with iridescent

touch and go hang   skins

another Monday on the line

to catch whatever weather comes to

pass

spread-eagled high above just one

of those days sometimes   laid bare by finger-light

it seems not even a choice

to slip like water over wood grain

to whatever course.

Reel 4

Up and down the celluloid

Oh the hand to mouth   round and round the spindle

I promise you he said he would

come I do not know

some problem I don't know

he couldn't come I really want   multi-occupancy fast food

sometimes we can have some   litter failed schools pebble-dash

issues with that no   allotments desirable canal-side

anything can happen   apartments country-park kayaking

green belt riding stables

rotted willow prone eco-

preservation set-aside and

in reverse whatever

I need to contact   past-present past-

people there must be   untouchable reels click-knit

a place he made   tight to shots of dead pan

a fist of it that's kind   undefended

of the truth of it   lips and

This faded wall was built

to hold the heat for peaches

 excoriating velvet skin

but lavender's a boon for bees

when I am king dilly dilly I shall

yodel with a tea cosy of roses

on my head

or leap a run of breakwaters

poke out the bulging eyes of

bungalows

galore galore

and when I'm sore

a happy handed candle scene

oh how you hesitate and look

around

for exits

Why are you sleeping

on my doorstep?

without your shoes

it's a long way

back in bare feet

you will bleed and anyone

can follow your trail under

the arch to the green door

at the end of the passage

with the keys slammed inside.

Reel 5

The film is twisted here

One day, sitting like Jerome,

inside a polished skull   spliced with cracked tape

I looked out through a socket,

 met your eye fully charged   one false move and there's the rub

for flight a plane roars on the runway,   loop the loop pull out a length

alive with scarabs scuttling up   for close inspection:

the gangway turning back tumbling

through ashes of roses

sun blinds my hands I try

to get the lid shut on this

case of I try

to shut the lid I try

to close the case before

the relics spill and I   This cannot take exposure.

I could not fly and I

Re-wind

The end whips fast and loose

spills, pools

wants its own way out

of the exchange

Grey ghost ground round   hand wheel re-thread now

packed tight spools   spin-reel and run

ground face down tight forced face backwards to the start

foulmouth grimace limbs wound

circulation cut off Wednesday,

full of woe   The opening shot.

Second Sight

1.

Laid out under the ice in the ditch

Are last year's broken lances.

There will be spring of course.

Something will catch the eye, then.

Some tasselled favour from a lyre bird

lying among the new roots

of another time.

I shall want to brave the sharp tongued reeds

and pick it up

2.

stained glass bleeds like rust,

or paint, or blood,

blotting a thin-skinned wall.

They took the windows out for war.

The benefactors, saints, the Lamb,

judgement, paradise, damnation,

went back broken.

These days see right through them.

In Memoriam.

Remaindered

letters banded black on leaded ochre.

So here I lay you down

in your word.

And I shall lie down carefully beside you.

You: folded like a brain inside the letters of your name.

3.

You really only have to look

at coral reefs to get the drift: the deep

brain prompts foraging, rewards, retreat

from cold, hibernation, the keeping of secrets.

The soul, poor beautiful idea, flits

and starts on a screen behind our eyes

craning

for the word to come

4.

Now I am throwing things at you one

after the other any thing to hand

to hit to hurt because

no word comes trotting

from the west I hear pin pricks

of light through the space where you

are scanning the horizon with one hand

over your mouth

5.

And here I am

mining this recurring seam.

I do not have to feel

for it with my tongue.

I can number all your bones. I know

the length of your back and your beauty

I keep inside a globe

visible only to my naked eye.

If I open my fingers

I catch

searchlight through the glass

6.

A vicar on the radio says he

knows. From experience.

There's life after death.

Or something.

Place memory. Some thing

animates it. Some

animals and unsophisticated children

can perceive it.

Also, some people, he says, don't

realise that they are dead.

They need a prayer to send them on their way.

It has been known to work.

There's definitely something there,

he says.

Here, it's crystal clear

and clean

of fingerprints, the ectoplasm trail

of altruism, the transcendental option's

out.

7.

Eternal life, I think, becomes you

better than eternal rest.

The dress code for eternal bliss

says human bodies must be worn.

No naked souls.

Eros is located here just

here the human flesh definitively must

return the kiss

O

from Bugarach

1.

The end begins, it's said,

with barely detectable shifts,

tectonic shrugs,

shale shivers

a clatter of minor but destructive

meteor showers

chatter shows report

a line of esoterics,

rucksacked hunchbacks

head down sky eyes iced clouds flying

to the pic

where stratatilting time raises

the dead.

a pilgrims' pencil line

marks up the bald faced halleluia path;

the mountains march off

to meet their maker

cameras crane along the cliff ledge

max production hazard imperative

not to miss Armageddon

rip the mantle

from the old crone's crust

there will never be another

shot

when inter-planetary impact kicks the globe

right out of grasp no safety

net between the stars, no

catch-all clause, indemnity against the loss

of all hands over the event horizon into space-time

singularity

2.

Put the mic to the rock

the saved lay hands on

the cave wall thrums with the arrival

of expressly self-generative robots

the elect will be raised up

for the transfer

of essential traces to a new location

if you believe you've got to be

here with see-through souls

waiting to be

scanned for suitability

so many bare-faced souls

spread eager for robotic rapture

secrets splayed out on the floor.

salvation is not theoretical here.

3.

The stars are close

enough to grasp in the same hand

as the mountains

fingers aching

for a signal, skimming

unsent texts by phone light.

scaling the

pointed seconds until dawn,

dangling off the spearhand clock

like Harold Lloyd

impossible to hold on unthinkable

to let go and

the impact will tear the corners of the blanket

from the kindly firemen's hands.

Lukewarm dregs

of coffee in a dented

thermos lid.

These boots

have had it.

The long drop.

Not a crumb of comfort

 crusted limestone, ground

into this hill, track, cobbled path.

4.

Do we hope for some chartered busy chariot?

Or pragmatic transmigration into flocks

of supernatural birds whose eternal wings

will soar us through the armies of avenging angels

ladling destruction from their plague bowls?

Every heavy-headed word is staked

prophesy-burdened it would hang

this way the workers can mine indications

from its throat.

Swarms chase after locusts and wild

honey crazy for goodness and kindness

and guiding stars on every pinnacle.

Faces press conviction

in my face

We are walking on tonight

I cannot see your hand in front

of your face.

A blue cloak

wraps around the world.

Shake the folds and little

people tumble out and roll

into dark corners.

Consider sheep. Their feet

too disproportionately neat to keep

from toppling into the ravine. Consider

how one might stall and break

its fall against a larch, bleat

unavailingly for, say, six hours

(they cannot howl) writhe free

and roll through this year's saplings

into the backstop whirlpool black before

the rapids and its mother

cannot help it, and the shepherd

cannot help it and the sheepdog

cannot help it out of the depths

5.

Glint light

bias binding

frayed reed edges

drawn through

the shred needle eye

of maybe a spire's perspective point.

One crouched tree-bone

pulls the horizon out of true

Below, an unattended burglar alarm

shrieks violation;

by the canal forty-two thousand plague crossed planes

march out of step

wicker branches netting fallen reflections

rat rippled shallows

stippled rushes

fallow grass

last-year's rusted sun flowers.

An undercurrent lisps

contagion from contusion

of submerged roots.

This is a stopped place.

The dogs are starved of affection.

The soil is fully automated.

The sky is giving nothing away.

Plague, trumpets, mythic beasts,

who needs Seraphim?

We grind our own dirt on the virgin blue

Coo dolly dolly down the tube

War brings out the best in us

Right and Might so clean and bright

marching in step

swinging along

6.

Minutes scab across

a steel meniscus

few words fall from

here to where

a sharpened cry

is brought down

by the sky.

Darkness shifts a little

and the step down to today

lights a touch sooner on the hill.

Once, it came upon the midnight clear.

There was a stable on the other side

lined with log ends of days to come, each held

in place by the weight of the whole.

Now listen to the prophets grind the day turn

dark to light the symbiotics shot over

weighted there is no room on the pin

head we fold our wings and shuffle up some

more cluster along the roof-roost

chattering like bats in plastic film lined up

along a media wall

7.

dawn ekes it out

spits daylight through frost bitten lips,

picks on some detail underfoot.

One minute

60 second thoughts

time's up

up to the rocking stone, the balanced ball.

Just you wait

watch the water fail the earth

the deer

flee into thin air

and break

Who thought that it would help

the situation to lattice the backbent earth

with landing lights for some messiah?

God holds His breath

Stopwatches a brown bird on pencil legs

these are the last things:

a thousand camera clicks

rain clattering on tambourines

Creep inside my coat

It smells of shabby earth

I wish

basket worn shadows on a cycle Sunday evening dust mote path along a
slow canal

I wish
you

       ah,

              well

Part 2

A New Cave Flooded To Light[14]

This study aims to answer three questions: first, on what basis might Graham be described as an apocalyptic poet? Second, what does this contribute to our understanding of his work and what does it tell us about the genre? Third, what contribution does reading Graham through this lens makes to the project itself.

The apocalyptic genre has generated a very substantial range of treatments and commentary. By way of context, the chapter which follows, summarises, as points of reference, some relevant understandings of apocalyptic literature.

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[14] *Notes* p. 381. This phrase appears in the context of a reference Graham makes to Blake, but does not appear itself to be attributable to him. It seems likely that Graham had in mind the 'Allegory of the Cave' in Plato's *Republic.* According to Tony Lopez, Graham attended lectures in Philosophy at Newbattle Abbey in 1938-39. See Tony Lopez, *The Poetry of W. S. Graham*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989) p. 2; hereafter Lopez.

Chapter 1: The Apocalyptic Genre

> The soul, poor beautiful idea, flits
>
> and starts on a screen behind our eyes
>
> craning
>
> for the word to come.

Peripheral Visions: 'Correspondence', 5

1.1 Understandings of apocalypse and apocalyptic literature

It is beyond the scope of this study to offer an exhaustive account of the evolution of apocalyptic literature. The aim of this chapter is to identify, as points of reference, some understandings of the genre, and to provide a brief summary of aspects of its development which are relevant to this project.

The literal meaning of 'apocalypse' is un-covering, or revelation.[15] Despite common misunderstandings which interpret it exclusively in terms of

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[15] *OED* gives: Apocalypse: 1. (with capital initial): The 'revelation' of the future granted to St John in the isle of Patmos. The book of the New Testament in which this is recorded. 2. By extension: Any revelation or disclosure. a. Christian Church. The events described in the revelation of St John; the Second Coming of Christ and the ultimate destruction of the world. b. More generally: a disaster resulting in drastic, irreversible damage to human society or the environment, esp. on a global scale; a cataclysm. Also in weakened use. *Etymology Online* gives: ''revelation, disclosure,' from Church Latin *apocalypsis* 'revelation', from Greek *apokalyptein* 'uncover, disclose, reveal, from *apo* 'off, away from' […] PIE root ***kel-** (1)'"to cover, conceal, save.' […] Importantly for this study, ' Its general sense in Middle English was "insight, vision; hallucination".' https://www.etymonline.com

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extremity, apocalyptic literature traditionally also delivers a positive message; renewal, or at least a way out of crisis. David Ketterer observes that:

> […] it is readily apparent that the word has both a negative and a positive charge: there is a necessary correlation between the destruction of the world and the establishment of the New Jerusalem. [16]

The Biblical *Book of Revelation* is a paradigmatic example, in that the narrative revolves around the three essential elements of the genre: catastrophe, judgement, and renewal. To an extent, the text can be read as propaganda,[17] rather than prophecy, in that highly symbolic language furnishes the narrative with allusions to past history and literature in order to convince persecuted early Christians that they too can hope for rescue, and promises judgement and subsequent catastrophic destruction of their persecutors, as well as a glorious future for the saved in paradise following the end of this world.

It has been argued that in the twentieth century 'apocalypse' lost its positive charge and came only to mean catastrophe; that, while 'the inheritance of New Jerusalem is a crucial part of the traditional apocalyptic story the

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[16] David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old: The Apocalyptic imagination, science fiction, and American literature* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1974), p. 7.

[17] Adela Yarbro Collins, 'The Apocalypse (Revelation)' in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary,* ed. by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy (London: Geoffrey Chapman, student paperback edition 1993), p.997. Hereafter *Jerome Biblical Commentary.*

paradigm has evolved to lack this element or change it'.[18]   It persists,
however, in theological understandings of the genre. As recently as 1979,
The Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project offered the following
theological definition:

> a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which
> a revelation is mediated by an other-worldly being to a human
> recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal
> insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial insofar as
> it involves another supernatural world.[19]

This is the model followed by medieval dream poems such as *Pearl*, which
tell a story in which an other-worldly being uncovers to the mortal subject
the error of their interpretation of events and reveals paradise as a reward
after death for reform, based on a change of perception, in this life.

Apocalypse is not, however, necessarily linked to the supernatural. For the
Romantic poets, and Shelley in particular, the message does not come from
another world but from the poet's own apprehension of this one. F. T.
Prince, writing of Shelley, observes:

> He believed that human life, and even Nature and the universe,
> could be transformed – and would be transformed – if mankind had

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[18] Elizabeth K Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation: apocalypse and the post-
modern imagination* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2008), p. xiv.
[19] John Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to the Jewish
Matrix of Christianity* (New York, Crossroad, 1984), p. 4.

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faith in freedom, justice and love, and acted out their principles. All of Shelley's longer poems are intended to contribute to the desired revolution and transformation [...] The *Ode to the West Wind* […] presents him in his chosen function as a prophet of revolution.[20]

In the *Ode to the West Wind* the natural world functions as a vehicle for the poet's own vision of destruction and hope of renewal, and it is itself also implicated in the process of transformation. As Prince observes, however, in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* not only does Prometheus free the earth by refusing to submit to a tyrannical God (Jupiter), he places Man at the centre 'Where all things flow to all', and where

the abyss shouts from her depth laid bare,

Heaven, hast thou secrets? Man unveils me; I have none.[21]

Man himself has become the apocalyptic messenger. As the one who discloses secrets, he is, in the words of the New Apocalyptics, the 'supreme myth'.

The dominance of man and the intellect is presented in the less spiritual, but nonetheless dynamic, version of apocalypse offered by David Ketterer. This is relevant because it is neither political, social, nor religious, but dependent

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[20] F. T.Prince, 'Percy Bysshe Shelley' in *Poets on Poets*, ed. by Nick Rennison and Michael Schmidt (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1997), p.329.
[21] Extracts from Percy Bysshe Shelley, 'Prometheus Unbound', in *Romantic and Victorian Poetry*, ed. by William Frost (Eaglewood Cliffs N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965) pp. 214-20.

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on the credibility of a creative process and a response situated in the imaginative capabilities of the individual:

> Apocalyptic literature is concerned with the creation of other worlds which exist, on the literal level, in a credible relationship (whether on the basis of rational extrapolation and analogy or of religious belief) with the 'real' world, thereby causing a metaphorical destruction of that 'real' world in the reader's head. The apocalyptic imagination may finally be defined in terms of its philosophical preoccupation with that moment of juxtaposition and consequent transformation or transfiguration when an old world of mind discovers a believable new world of mind, which either nullifies and destroys the old system entirely or, less likely, makes it part of a larger design.[22]

The intellect has become the mediator, and the action is metaphorical rather than metaphysical. The revelation, however, must be believable; it depends on a credible relationship with the 'real' world.

1.2 The end of hope

In Ketterer's definition, the revelation is neutral. The 'new world of mind' could be positive or negative. Commentators have argued that, with increasing secularisation, the element of hope has been eliminated from the

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[22] David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old,* p.13.

apocalyptic genre; there is no renewal. A revelation which is entirely negative therefore becomes possible. Judgement is the key action of the narrative, and it is delivered through a prophetic voice which 'catalogues what is wrong but changes nothing'.[23] Writing in 1962, in the context of the twentieth century's horrors, including the threat of nuclear catastrophe, Jeff Nuttall describes a pervasive hopelessness:

> The unbearable was now clearly visible [...] We knew for certain that governments had nothing whatsoever to do with the morality they preached and enforced, that society had lost its appetite for life and looked forward to the death it had contrived […] that none of us was sufficiently alarmed about extinction to force the murderers to put down their weapons, that society commanded nothing but contempt, much less dedicated labour or respect for law, that love, honour, faith, selflessness were as false in ourselves as in our elders … that the only thing we *could* do was sit in humiliation and wait for extinction.[24]

Language itself undermines hope; by definition, the future can never be present. We exist in a paradoxically eternal now, which is, as Frank Kermode points out,[25] *always* transitional thus always in crisis (the end happening at *every* moment – immanence, not imminence); 'the "end-

[23] Elizabeth K Rosen, *Apocalyptic Transformation,* p. xix.
[24] Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London, MacGibbon & Kee Ltd, 1968, this edition published by Paladin, 1970), p. 105.
[25] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: studies in the theory of fiction*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967; this edition 1970), p. 25. Hereafter *The Sense of an Ending*.

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feeling" thrown onto the moment'. This is significant in considering Graham as an apocalyptic poet: that the crisis of the end is inherent in every word once it is 'fixed and dead' is evidenced particularly in 'The Constructed Space' (NCP 162), from which these words are taken, and given dramatic treatment in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' (NCP 153).

1.3 Time and organisation

In *The Sense of an Ending*, Kermode questions the very possibility of a specifically apocalyptic category of literature. He argues instead that all fiction is apocalyptic in that it is generated by the human need for an organising structure to make sense of our existence in time:

> in 'making sense' of the world we still feel a need, harder than ever to satisfy because of an accumulated scepticism, to experience that concordance of beginning, middle, and end which is the essence of our explanatory fictions, and especially when they belong to cultural traditions which treat historical time as primarily rectilinear rather than cyclic.[26]

The treatment of time is a fundamental element in the apocalyptic tradition. But, arguably, its traditional organising structure is not designed to meet the need for the concordance to which Kermode refers. In the New Testament *Book of Revelation*, although the prophetic voice speaks urgently in the

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[26] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending* p.35.

'now' about the past, present and future, and the narrative is a key agent of change, it is not linear. The structure is complex and repetitive. Prophecies, stories, quotations, symbols and images from the Old Testament are used as points of reference to endow the discourse with resonance and authority, to impress the message on the minds of receivers in the present and to inform a vision of the future. As the constantly postponed fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies demonstrates, the end of history is always still to come, thus eternally present in a future eschatological time.[27] As history transforms perceptions of the present and future, so present and future transform understandings of the past. This reciprocal process achieves a sense both of simultaneity and eternity. [28]

In Graham's work, too, we see a non-linear treatment of time. 'Enter A Cloud' and 'Implements In Their Places', in particular, question the lived meaning of time by ending with the repetition of their opening couplet. Graham, however, deploys a variety of treatments: in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' time is distorted, and its relationship to space broken up like the rafts of ice in the poem's topography, thus augmenting the sense of the instability of language and compounding the alienation of the reader. 'The Night City' (NCP 215) and 'Ten Shots Of Mister Simpson' (NCP 210) offer examples of how Graham's layered structures, in which history, memory, myth, quotation and allusion interact with the present moment of

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[27] John J. Collins, 'Old Testament Apocalypticism and Eschatology' in *Jerome Biblical Commentary* pp.298 – 304.

[28] For a useful outline of the composition and structure of the New Testament *Book of Revelation* see Adela Yarbro Collins in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, section 63, pp 999 – 1000.

the poem, achieve a Modernist simultaneity which reveals new perspectives. Throughout his work, moreover, Graham's use of dreams and visions takes us out of 'real' time into a different experience.

1.4 The Apocalyptic imagination

John J. Collins points out that

> The key to a proper appreciation of the apocalyptic tradition lies in the realization that apocalypses are more of the nature of poetry than of dogma. They are works of imagination […] Their value lies in their ability to envisage alternatives to the world of present experience'[29]

The apocalyptic imagination does, however, employ some common, if coded, devices. A list might include:

myths and legends

visions and dreams

visitors from another world

metaphorical stories of battles and heroic events

cosmic imagery

symbolic beasts and monsters

utopias

symbolic gardens and topography

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[29] John J. Collins, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 304.

> symbolic landscapes and cities
>
> versions of heaven and hell
>
> their inhabitants
>
> simultaneity, or a reciprocal treatment of time
>
> journeys of revelation and transformation.

Graham's apocalypticism involves more than ticking boxes, but a run through this checklist would find all of these devices in his published poems and the most significant are identified in the more detailed discussion in the chapters which follow.

If apocalypses are primarily works of imagination, the presence of the Muse, not only as visitor from another world, but as the personification of imagination is critical. As noted in the Introduction, Graham's changing relationship with her is linked to the increasing negativity of his apocalyptic vision. The Muse, however, is also Graham's entrée to the world of imagination, allowing him to become 'the explorer who shoots the sun.'[30] She empowers him to construct alternative realities – positive or negative – which determine his being as a poet.

To summarise: apocalyptic literature is primarily concerned with revelation through the convincing depiction of catastrophe, judgement and renewal. Over time the apocalyptic genre has lost its hopeful element, and its

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[30] W. S. Graham, 'Notes On A Poetry Of Release' in *The Nightfisherman: Selected Letters of W. S. Graham* ed. by Michael and Margaret Snow (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1999) p. 380. Hereafter *Notes* and *Nightfisherman* respectively.

relationship to a universal understanding of eschatology, moving its action from the soul to the individual intellect in a process of privatisation. Its method, the revelation through language of an otherwise inaccessible reality, remains relevant, however, and the chapters below explore what this means in Graham's work. First, however, the next chapter situates him in the context of apocalyptic elements in the poetic movements which influenced him.

Chapter 2: 'A New Cave Flooded To Light'

>   'past is just
>
>   a figure of speech we all know
>
>   what lies over the edge, not oblivion
>
>   but bottled myths
>
>   in rows backlit tableaux enlivened
>
>   by sound effects'
>
>   (*Peripheral Visions*: from 'Sightlines' 6)

                    *   *   *

This chapter contributes to understanding W. S. Graham as an apocalyptic poet by situating him in relation to the influence of the New Apocalyptics, Modernism, Surrealism, and Robert Graves's 'The White Goddess'.   It addresses, too, his pursuit of authenticity through automatic writing.

2.1: W. S. Graham and his world

W. S. Graham was influenced by the poetic movements of his time, as well as by the ideas of the visual artists who were his companions, and he cannot be categorised exclusively in terms of any one of them. He drew on all of them, and on much else. He is often portrayed as an isolated recluse, but his range of contacts was wide and, for the most part, seriously engaged with the creation of visual art or poetry. The list of correspondents in *The Night*

Fisherman: Selected Letters of W. S. Graham[31] runs from Astbury to Wynter and contains 66 names, 31 of which belong to poets and 15 to painters. The reconstruction of his room exhibited at The Poetry Library in London from October 2018 – 31 January 2019, included on the bookshelves works by Elizabeth Smart, Arthur Rimbaud, Dylan Thomas, Vernon Watkins, James Joyce, George Barker, Michael Hamburger, W. S. Auden, Paul Valéry, Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot, Hugh McDiarmaid, Wallace Stevens, Herbert Read, Ezra Pound, Robert Graves, W. B. Yeats, David Gascoyne, Fridtjof Nansen, Edwin Morgan, John Berryman, David Jones, Anne Riddler, Charles Causley, Hart Crane, and Samuel Beckett.

Graham was a poet; he was not a systematic thinker, but he engaged sincerely with the artistic preoccupations of his time. Living as he did among visual artists who challenged the conventions of representation, undoubtedly influenced his poetic development. In this chapter, however, the focus is on poetic influences relating to apocalyptic themes. These include the New Apocalyptics' quest for renewal, re-integration and authenticity, the latter, in Graham's case, extending into experiments with automatic writing. As important was the influence of Eliot, and Modernism's commitment to 'seeing new', particularly through the dynamism of images and techniques of simultaneity. The influence of Robert Graves's account of the mythic White Goddess and of the origin of poetry in her service can also be traced throughout Graham's oeuvre and

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[31] *Nightfisherman*, pp. 386 – 96.

will be discussed throughout this study, particularly in relation to the Muse. This chapter makes some more general points by way of context.

2.2 Graham and the New Apocalyptics

'Apocalypse' meant different things to different members of the New Apocalyptic movement. A. E. Salmon points to an inherent confusion among them about the meaning of the term, arguing that, for J. F.Hendry, it meant a philosophy of social collapse, while Henry Treece and G. S. Fraser were more focussed on the revelation of unconscious processes, and Vernon Watkins stressed the   importance of 'myth as a means to understanding human needs'. For Alex Comfort

> Apocalypse was a planned attempt to inject more eloquence and more archimagical touch into poetry which had become a bit dry in the hands of our immediate predecessors [...] It leaned heavily on what was in effect Bardic diction (odd that we didn't learn more from Yeats)[32]

Salmon highlights the influence of Herbert Read's cynicism about war and politics, and points out, too, the continuing influence of evangelical Christianity and traditional eschatology, as well as the influence in the 1940s of anarchist visions of the end of the world and the beginning of

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[32] Arthur Edward Salmon, *Poets of the Apocalypse* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983), p. 9.

another and the back projection of anarchist perspectives found in Tolstoy, Thoreau, Peter Kropotkin, William Godwin, and Percy Bysshe Shelley.[33]

Insofar as they subscribed to a common agenda, the New Apocalyptics conformed to the traditional apocalyptic paradigm: they posited a vision – the prophetic identification of problem and solution. This contained within it both a negative judgement on an existing world order and a positive promise of renewal after (and through?) a time of trial expressed often in symbolic terms but always implying a radical rejection of the status quo. Like Modernism, of which some see them as a Romantic development,[34] theirs was a resistance through reconnection with tradition. Their interest, however, was not in a new vision but in uncovering what they saw as unchanging truths about 'man' which ran counter to and thus critiqued prevailing orthodoxies.

Their determination not to shirk the darker regions of the subconscious was the result of an insight which rejected what they saw as the de-humanisation of society and they hoped, through a radical rediscovery of what it is to be human, to address 'the central problem' of living through 'the approach to

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[33] Salmon, Arthur Edward, *Poets of the Apocalypse*, pp. 91 – 99.

[34] James Keery observes that: 'In the BBC talk by Herbert Read on "The New Romantic School", broadcast on 7 April 1942, Dylan Thomas, Henry Treece and Alex Comfort are identified as the protagonists in a romantic renewal of modernism itself.' James Keery, 'Paper Tigers, Burning Bright!' in *PN Review* (33.6, July/August 2007), pp.61 – 62.

the wholeness of man in place of abstractions'.[35] They argued for an 'organic' approach which would break through the structures of language and social convention to a point where 'absolute norms break down and man stands forth as the ultimate reality to be reckoned with on earth.'

In 1938 Dylan Thomas, who promoted, befriended and influenced Graham and was lionised by the Apocalyptics, refused to sign their Manifesto, remarking: 'I agree with it, and like much of it, and some of it, I think, is manifestly absurd'.[36] A few years later, however, writing to J. F. Hendry in 1946, Graham certainly seems not to have been against the possibility of inclusion in a forthcoming anthology.[37] While this possibly reflects his ambition to be published and a desire for recognition as much as enthusiasm for the cause, it is worth noting that his most significant account of his emerging poetic theory was also published in that year, and in its title, *Notes On A Poetry Of Release*,[38] carries an echo of Hendry's own emphasis on the need for 'a mode of release'[39] (that title, as ever with

[35] J. F. Hendry, 'Writers and Apocalypse' in Dorian Cooke, J.F.Hendry and others, *The New Apocalypse: An Anthology of Criticism, Poems and Stories* (London: The Fortune Press, 1941) p.9.

[36] Dylan Thomas, letter to Henry Treece, 3 December 1938, in *Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, ed. by Constantine FitzGibbon, (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1965,) pp.290 – 91, quoted in Lopez, Tony, *The Poetry of W. S. Graham* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1989) p. 21.

[37] *The Nightfisherman* includes five letters from Graham to J.F.Hendry. The first (26 May 1946) concerns Hendry's reported interest in considering work by Graham and his wife,Nessie Dunsmuir, for possible inclusion in an anthology. It also comments disparagingly on work (by others) in *Scottish Life and Letters* . The other letters solicit practical help of various kinds. See *The Nightfisherman:* pp 66, 73 and 137. Herbert Read appears as a figure in the [poetic] establishment, see pp. 40, 72, 73, 94.

[38] *Notes*, first published in *Poetry Scotland,* July 1946.

[39] J.F. Hendry, 'Writers and Apocalypse' in *The New Apocalypse'* pp. 9 – 10.

Graham, working on more than one level, however; its association with Modernism and Eliot is discussed below).

In his review of Graham's *New Collected Poems,*[40] Peter Riley emphasises, with regard to Graham's work, that:

> one important thing to note […] is that there is no sense of subversion about it. It is not an act of protest, it is not mocking or deconstructing any official or authoritarian public usage, it is distinct from normality but not at war with it. Certainly with Graham it is conceived in a purer sense, as the language formed out of the meeting or confrontation of personal and impersonal spheres, the self and the earth in action within each other, and the only true speech of that theatre. It does not have any direct relationship with state power and it removes itself almost entirely from the mechanisms of political and structural regency. Indeed the tone is dominantly optimistic, confident, and bright, while acknowledging the full force of resistance.[41]

If that was the whole story, this description would make Graham an unlikely apocalyptic writer, and it sits uneasily with the bleakness of much

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[40] *W. S. Graham, New Collected Poems*, ed. by Matthew Francis (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2004).

[41] Peter Riley reviews *W.S. Graham, New Collected Poems,* ed.by Matthew Francis, in *Jacket* 26, httpp://jacketmagazine.com/26/rile-grah.html
Riley is referring to Graham's early work, but maintains that while the poetic is simplified, Graham's essential concerns remain unchanged over time.

of his work. Moreover, with reference to *The White Threshold*, Tony Lopez notes that:

> There is no political statement and no ideology in the poems [...] Yet his work has a political dimension that is obvious as soon as we begin to read across from one poem to another. The language resists a remote standardising authority, and the same authority is implicated in the suffering that comes from warfare, to which the region's [ie Clydeside's] industry is harnessed. A view of this warfare is available in, for instance, the phrase 'suiciding principle' which is far from neutral and offers comment and judgement on the remote authority that polices the town.[42]

It is in this resistance to a 'standardising authority' that Graham is on common ground with the New Apocalyptics. In a letter to Alex Comfort, dated 12 December 1945, he expressed sympathy with the views expressed in Comfort's article in *NOW 4*, which

> again starts in me that almost destroying indignation against not just the tyrants who lash the people but against the (in each heart) inherent lack of life which makes the lashing possible.[43]

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[42] Lopez, p.43.
[43] *Nightfisherman*, p.54.

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2.3 Approaches to myth

The New Apocalyptics emphasised the role of myth, understood as the creative embodiment of consciousness. They argued in their Manifesto that

> myth is today of extreme importance, both psychologically and pathologically, for the re-integration of the personality …

and that

> the 'machine' age in which we live, with its terrifying objectivity, has revived the myth as a mode of release from the object-machine, whether state, system or rationalisation.[44]

In his introduction to *The New Apocalypse*, Hendry emphasises the relationship between 'man', the creative instinct, and 'nature', placing 'man' as part of the forces of nature, insisting on *man* as myth, and the 'prophetic' aspect of myth as the projection of self, 'the creative instinct working on matter.'[45] 'Prophetic' here should not be understood as having to do with foretelling the future; rather, it is used – as it is in the Bible – to signify speech which reveals a 'mythic' or divine truth. For the New Apocalyptics, that truth was located in the archetypes – the 'myths' – buried in the subconscious. Graham does not dismiss the poet's 'consciousness of the prophetic in the language'. Neither does he resile from his responsibility

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[44] J. F. Hendry, *The New Apocalypse,* p.9.
[45] J. F. Hendry, *The New Apocalypse,* pp.9 – 10.

to project that consciousness, which is the 'special purpose' of the poem. It could be argued that, at least at the time of writing the '*Notes*', he shares the New Apocalyptics' project of renewal as he asks: 'What is to be done?' and, by way of an answer, proposes poetry as a means ' To bisect the angle between God and man and find the earliest distance between heart and head.'[46] But on the question of 'myth' he takes a different stand. In *Notes,* he firmly resists the idea of the creative instinct as the projection of self, asserting that:

> A poem is made of words. It is words in a certain order, good or bad by the significance of its addition to life and not to be judged by any other value put upon it by imagining how or why or by what kind of man it was made.[47]

Modernism's conclusions regarding contemporary history were as negative as those of the New Apocalyptics, but its use of myth was aimed at the revelation, for those who could receive them, of new connections, rather than at reintegration. Anthony Mellors describes Pound's view that:

> Like esoteric discourse, the modernist poem should be an embodied enigma, impervious to rational analysis but able to mystify the rabble while acting as a visionary text for the initiated few.[48]

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[46] *Notes*, p. 381.
[47] *Notes*, p. 380.
[48] Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: from Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p.30.

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Graham's vision is not, however, gnostic. Nor, despite, or maybe because of, his difficult relationship with language, does he wish the poem to be an enigma; the one-way traffic between poet and reader is a real obstacle to achieving the 'release' he strives for. But the 'poetry of release' is a visionary concept nonetheless, and for Graham the vision is informed by two 'mythical' influences. One is the powerful 'legend' of Eliot, and the other is the mythic poetic tradition synthesised in Robert Graves' *The White Goddess.*

With regard to the former, Jeremy Noel-Tod observes that:

> A notebook from 1949, the year in which he published his fourth collection, *The White Threshold,* gives an insight into how Graham very deliberately apprenticed himself to be a poet […] in the modernist tradition he admired. In between reflections on his own writing, he copied out passages from T. S. Eliot, who had recently, as poetry editor at Faber and Faber, become his publisher. Graham remembered this life-changing event in 'The Night City' […] lines that suggest […] the legendary aura that surrounded the author of *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* in the late 1940s. This is also something that he comments on in his 1949 notebook:
>
>> Eliot – the legend behind the man making his poetry 'magic'.
>>
>>> Each profundity of technique put forwards charges the poetry more. …

Later he returns to this idea with a command to self:

> In future projects – remember the constructing of the myth[49]

With regard to 'the constructing of the myth', F. R. Leavis observes in his study of *The Waste Land*, that through allusions, references and quotations which call up the power of their past,

> Mr Eliot […] attains […] a compression approaching simultaneity – the co-presence in the mind of a number of different orientations, fundamental attitudes, orders of experience.[50]

Eliot himself pinpoints, with reference to *Ulysses*, one purpose of this simultaneity and the use of myth to achieve it:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him […] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.[51]

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[49] Jeremy Noel-Tod, Introduction to *The Caught Habits of Language*: *An Entertainment for W. S. Graham for Him Having Reached One Hundred*, ed. by Rachel Boast, Andy Ching, Nantan Hamilton, (Bristol: Donut Press, 2018) p.3.

[50] F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of the Contemporary Situation,* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932) p.107.

[51] T. S. Eliot, 'Ulysses, Order, and Myth', in *Dial* LXX.5 (November 1923) p.483.

The simultaneity which Graham constructs also employs myth. Lopez observes, for instance, the conflation in 'The Nightfishing' of the identity of Odysseus and that of Christ.[52] In Graham's later work, particularly, the revelation goes far beyond the parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, although he is adept at handling layers of time and reference. Where he is most successful is in sustaining a multiplicity of parallel experience: between the poet and the world of literature; between the topography of place and its history, personal and impersonal; between internal and external experience; between the real and the imagined. What is most interesting, however, is Graham's use of simultaneity both to make new connections and to posit 'otherness', one of the fundamental tasks of apocalyptic literature. This is discussed in detail in relation to 'Ten Shots Of Mister Simpson' in Chapter 6.

Lopez points out, with regard to Graham's earlier work, that religious imagery was inherent in the culture of the time, be it through a new appreciation of the work Gerard Manley Hopkins (whose work had a strong influence on Graham) or as a negative presence in Surrealist parody or blasphemy.[53] 'The White Threshold' (NCP 92) is furnished with mythic Christian and Celtic references.[54] The Christian images, in particular, generate a negative moral undertow which re-emerges in Graham's later work, particularly in the Holocaust images in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land'

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[52] Lopez, p. 63.

[53] Lopez, pp. 22 – 23.

[54] *The White Threshold* was published in 1949, a year after the first publication of Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*. It is beyond the scope of this study to offer an analysis of the Celtic references in *The White Threshold*, many of which can be traced to Graham's reading of *The White Goddess*.

(stanza 2 of section 5), and throughout 'Ten Shots Of Mister Simpson', as a serious judgement on contemporary history. The relationship with religion is not a positive one. According to Vivienne Koch, Graham had a strong aversion to Christian morality:

> Graham's morality is a morality of the anti-moral in the sense that the poet is questioning an ethic of self-sacrifice, of human saviourdom.[55]

Tony Lopez observes, with reference to the last section of 'The White Threshold' that 'At all points in the section we have a mix of Christian imagery with warfare, burning and drowning imagery' and that:

> Sacrifice of the self for state is the logic of warfare, it creates 'burning cities brother sister': the hellfire that the church used to keep the people in fear, has broken out in twentieth-century cities with air raids […]. His description of the Christ figure 'Good Phoebus youth nailed on the bleeding branches' steals the young man who suffers torture from the church […] .Ultimately the target is the Christian state, which brings us to warfare through Christianity.[56]

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[55] Vivienne Koch, 'A Note on W. S. Graham', in *Sewanee Review*, vol 56, no.4, Autumn 1948, p. 668, quoted in Lopez, p. 59.
[56] Lopez, p. 59.

But the poem moves us also towards other traditions, most obviously that of Anglo-Saxon literature, which links myth to the manner of its telling, to language.

Writing to Edwin Morgan in April 1949, Graham sets out how he had wanted to draw on Anglo-Saxon literature in 'The White Threshold' (published that year) and, particularly, why he wanted to do so in 'The Nightfishing' (NCP 105), on which he was currently working, although the collection was not published until 1955:

> I would like the strong physical action language which seems to be kept out of contemporary poetry as much as possible, maybe thought of as a sign of naivety. As you would notice in the T.W.T. excerpt I […] am drawn to very much to Anglo-Saxon words and language with that basic strong feel about it and recently in this poem I'm working on I've been going through all the Anglo-Saxon poems and earlier [...] I want a certain kind of strength in my work from the Anglo-Saxon poetry and even a certain faint echo but I must speak in the idiom of the language at its present point. To use archaicisms … they must be used very selfconsciously so that the knowledge that they are used by the poet to carry all their archaic associations goes towards the success of the poem.[57]

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[57] *Nightfisherman:* p. 95.

2.4 The apocalyptic force of the image

Apocalytpic writing aims to transform perception. Graham's apocalypticism can be desolate and frighteningly negative; 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' and 'Clusters Travelling Out' express the catastrophe inherent in dealings with language, while the three exposures of radical evil are starkly contrasted with the 'innocent' ballad form of 'The Gobbled Child', 'The Lost Miss Conn', and 'The Murdered Drinker'. *Notes On A Poetry Of Release*, however, expresses a positive charge, the task of revelation, which justifies the price exacted by the poetic enterprise, and is, at that stage in Graham's work, the criterion by which its success is to be judged :

> What is to be done? […] To join Man and Word […] To present before him an addition to the world like this which Blake made where the reader is left not to agree or disagree as to its rightness but to answer from a new cave flooded to light.[58]

The link between the New Apocalyptic manifesto and the title, *Notes On A Poetry Of Release* has been noted above. The link between that title and the following observation from T. S. Eliot regarding Baudelaire is, however, more significant:

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[58] *Notes*, p. 381.

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It is not merely in the use of imagery […] but in the elevation of

such imagery to the *first intensity* – presenting it as it is, and yet

making it represent something much more than itself – that

Baudelaire has created a mode of release and expression for other

men.[59]

Graham's statement below reinforces this association in the highly

compressed image at its start:

A man's imagining suddenly may inherit the handclapping centuries

of his one minute on earth. He has to explore the imagination by

using the language as his pitch. On it he must construct (intuitively

to an organic as true as a tree) an apparatus which will work and to a

special purpose.[60]

In its emphasis also on the poem as a construct, an apparatus, as abstracted

out of intuition but to 'an organic true as a tree', that passage reminds us of

Graham's strong links with Modernism, the New Apocalyptics, and

Abstract Expressionism.   Tony Lopez argues, however, that, above all,

Graham should be understood in the context of Modernism:

Graham's work carries forward the insights and achievements of

Eliot, Joyce and Pound and develops them in a new way. When we

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[59] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 2nd. edn., 1934), p.388.
[60] *Notes,* pp. 380-81.

take stock of writing in English from a position that fully values *Four Quartets, Ulysses* and Pound's *Cantos*, then like Beckett, W. S. Graham will be seen as central to the development of that tradition.[61]

Certainly, in deciding to publish Graham but not Dylan Thomas, T. S. Eliot would seem to have seen Graham as the future. This is not the place to explore what it is in Graham's work which might be seen as central to the development of Modernism, but in considering him as an apocalyptic writer the role of the image provides a strong link not only to Modernism but to Walter Benjamin's 'dialectical' image which 'emerges suddenly in a flash' and

in the now of its recognisability […] bears to the highest degree the imprint of the perilous critical moment on which all reading is founded.[62]

In writing on Benjamin, Osborne and Charles summarise the significance of this in terms which could very well be applied to the action of apocalypse:

'In [such 'perilous critical moments], the past is understood 'to bring the present into a critical state'. However, this critical state is not a crisis of the status quo, but rather of its destruction: the critical

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[61] Lopez, p.131.

[62] Peter Osborne and Matthew Charles, 'Walter Benjamin' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* ed. by Edward N. Zalta
https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/benjamin/

moment is that in which 'the status quo threatens to be preserved' […] Dialectical images counter the threat of preservation (tradition) by virtue of the interruptive force they are understood to impart to experience as a consequence of the instantaneous temporality of the now, or what Benjamin famously called now-time [Jetztzeit]… and the corresponding image of historical experience as the discharge of an explosive force—the explosive force of now-time, blasting open 'the continuum of history'.[63]

In *Notes*, Graham provides his own interpretation of 'now-time':

History does not repeat itself. I am the bearer of that poetic outcome […] For the language is a changing creature continually being killed-off, added-to and changed like a river over its changing speakers […] Each word changes every time it is brought to life. Each single word uttered twice becomes a new word each time. You cannot twice bring the same word into sound. [64]

For all the temptation to link Graham's image of language as a river to the Heraclitian perception of continuity in flux, the significance of this passage lies in its insistence on the dramatic changeability of language, and its eternal negation of stasis.

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[63] Peter Osborne and Matthew Charles, 'Walter Benjamin' https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/benjamin
[64] *Notes*, p. 380.

First published in 1975, thirty-five years after Benjamin's death, 'The Night City' (NCP 215) illustrates a number of relevant apocalyptic elements. It also provides a breathtaking instance of a dialectical image in action.

That image has to burst out of 'literature' into a new reality. To set the scene, Graham uses a traditional device of apocalyptic writing: the visionary dream. He takes us into an other-worldly dream sequence, opening the poem with the echo of Oberon's greeting to Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'Ill met by moonlight',[65] as we find the poet 'Unmet at Euston'. As in a medieval dream vision, he is on a journey 'into the golden city'. Graham gives us, in fact, an explicit reference to such dream visions as he finds himself, in the third verse, like the protagonists of *Piers Plowman* or *Pearl*, contemplating his own fallen nature beside a 'bank' which stands between him and his desire:[66]

> And then I (O I have fallen down)
>
> Fell in my dream beside the Bank
>
> Of England's wall
>
> (NCP 215)

In these lines we are simultaneously made aware of the 'fall' from grace inherent in Graham's abandonment of Scotland, of the barrier which he has

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[65] William Shakespeare, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Act 1, Scene 2, line 60, in *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works,* general editors Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, paperback edition revised 1998) p. 316.

[66] See the discussion below of 'Enter A Cloud', the poem which follows 'The Night City' in *Implements In Their Places*, for a more detailed account of the relationship of Graham to the image of falling and to the dream vision.

now crossed between that world and this, made physical in 'England's [Hadrian's] wall' and the magical, deceptive lure of the world of literature expressed in the further reference to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the poet dreams, like Titania, on the bank and we remember where wild thyme grows[67] just as time goes wild in the poem.

At the end of this verse, the poet is, however, admitted to a sort of paradise because

> me
>
> With my money belt of Northern ice.
>
> I found Eliot and he said yes

This is a dream. Time seems to be distorted: 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' (Graham's 'cold poem'[68]) was actually only finished in 1966, after Eliot's death, and published by Faber in the collection of the same name in 1970, five years later. It is notable, nonetheless, how, as Jeremy Noel-Tod points out[69], Eliot has become the legend, the myth at the heart of the poem, admitting Graham, in verse four, to the company of a loosely linked collection of London figures: Holmes, Boswell, Whistler, John Donne, and Paul Potts, the Islington poet[70]. Then, fairy-tale-like, in stanza 5, with

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[67] Shakespeare, William, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 2 Scene 1, line 249.
[68] See *Nightfisherman*, p. 195.
[69] Jeremy Noel-Tod, *The Caught Habits of Language,* p.3.
[70] Apart from their association with London, the connections between them are elusive. In *A Scandal in Bohemia*, Sherlock Holmes says of the narrator Dr Watson: 'I am lost without my Boswell'. See A. Conan-Doyle, 'Adventures of Sherlock Holmes', Adventure 1.– A Scandal in Bohemia', Strand Magazine, Vol.2 (no.7), p.64.). Whistler's 'Nocturnes' – paintings of London maritime scenes –

an abrupt formal change, midnight chimes and the City empties. History has 'gone into literature' and vice versa, and into that space an image explodes:

> Between the big buildings
>
> I sat like a flea crouched
>
> In the stopped works of a watch.

This is certainly a perilous moment. On the stroke of midnight, the poet does not run back home like Cinderella to the world he escaped from. He seems at first trapped in dreamlike immobility, metamorphosed between Kafka and Dali, waiting for the crushing mechanism of the city to start up again. But a closer look reveals that this is not so. It is time – tradition – which has stood still. The mechanism of the watch has stopped and the buildings show no signs of life, but the flea is 'crouched', an image full of energy, packed with the resonance of Donne's biting 'love' poem, ready to jump out and away from the stopped watch. The transformative image negates the status quo.

2.5 The White Goddess

Chapter 24 of *The White Goddess* has the title 'The Single Poetic Theme'. In it Graves maintains that:

clearly belong in a 'Night City'; Paul Potts is associated with Islington, and drank in the pubs of Soho and Fitzrovia, where Graham may have met him, and his poetry was admired by Barker, T. S. Eliot, MacDiarmid, and Dylan Thomas, among others. Donne is, perhaps, the most significant connection because of his erotic poem 'The Flea'.

Originally, the poet was the leader of a totem-society of religious dancers […] All the totem-societies in ancient Europe were under the dominion of the Great Goddess, the Lady of the Wild Things; dances were seasonal and fitted into an annual pattern from which gradually emerges the single grand theme of poetry: the life, death and resurrection of the Spirit of the Year, The Goddess's son and lover.[71]

Graves's understanding of the Goddess differs from that of Graham in that it is objective, and not, as in Graham's case, existential. For all its extensive frame of reference, *The White Goddess* arrives at a relatively simple Classicist's conclusion: behind the unifying 'grand theme' stands the Goddess. She has many attributes and cultural incarnations, but she is, above all, the personification of the cycle of life itself, which is the 'matter' of poetry, and the historical role of the poet is to serve her.

Graham's understanding is existential. He conflates at various times the Goddess and the Muse, the Muse and language, the Muse and the imagination, the Muse and his own subconscious, but his relationship with her is significant throughout his work. 'Five Visitors To Madron' (NCP 188), is just one example of how directly he experiences her presence; he does not merely evoke her, and he does not summon her. She belongs to an apocalyptic rather than a classical tradition as the 'heavenly messenger' who mediates between the recipient of the vision and the alternative world

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[71] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, this edition 1952) p.432.

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it opens up. Like the other-worldly guides of traditional apocalyptic literature, such as the elders and angels in *Revelation*, or the allegorical figures in *Piers Plowman,* she acts as guide and, implicitly, as judge and gatekeeper of that other world.

Writing to Edwin Morgan in 1949,[72] Graham expresses her role in these terms :

> more and more, I realise the aloneness is a joy to live in and talk there to the most marvellous listener which is within my imagination and the limitations of that listener are the limitations of my poetry. So, certainly now I think – if I hadn't poetry – that place to be in the act of making poetry – what would I do? Where would there be the least peace in my life?

There is a unity here between 'the most marvellous listener', the imagination, and the poet. This relationship deteriorates, however as she reappears in Graham's later work. This is particularly apparent in a number of the poems in *Malcolm Mooney's Land*, and in the violence which surfaces in Graham's treatment of her in 'Implements In Their Places'.

The White Goddess was published in 1948, and, on reading it in 1949, Graham described it as 'the most stimulating book I've come across for

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[72] *Nightfisherman*, p. 94.

years.'[73] In 1946, however, towards the end of *Notes On A Poetry Of Release,* he had, himself, already articulated the essential wildness of the Muse, who thus explodes his own elevated attempts at poetic theorising:

> Then I find the muse laughing her fill in the Atholl Arms, fixing her face genteel not to be thought the whore she is.[74]

Nonetheless, the appeal for Graham of *The White Goddess* lay not only in its revelation of 'The Lady of Wild Things', but in its synthesis of archaic traditions, and the sense of continuity in symbol and story to which it gave him access. Graham's visionary presences also include other legendary figures, including Nansen and Scott, but more important are the writers who populate his work through allusion or quotation, and the cohorts of priestly poets evoked by Graves. Inclusion in this great tradition is one of Graham's most fundamental aims, and 'The Night City' expresses his excitement at the prospect, but exclusion is a constant fear and the inhabitants of the world of literature sit in constant judgement, peering out from behind the words at his performance.

2.6 'Expanded Consciousness': Surrealism, the Absurd, and authenticity

If apocalypse is taken to be the uncovering of a hitherto hidden reality which is true, even if only on its own terms, it therefore offers access to a more authentic way of being. Graham's resistance to a 'remote

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[73] *Nightfisherman,* p.84.
[74] *Notes*, p. 381.

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standardising authority' has been noted above. A concern for authenticity is a corollary of this.

Certainly the New Apocalyptics believed that, used freely and courageously, the 'human instinct' opened up depths of experience which a mechanistic society had repressed. Salmon quotes Herbert Read's observation that the New Apocalyptic movement 'derives from Surrealism' in being an effort 'to realise the dimensions and characteristics of man's submerged being', and he notes that 'surrealist influence allowed in theory a greater passivity and spontaneity in the creative process on the part of Neo-Romantic poets, as compared to Auden-generation poets and Neo-Classicists.'[75]

'Enter A Cloud' (NCP 216) is discussed more fully below. It is included here because it very consciously references Surrealism. In addition to the 'stage directions' in part 2 , Graham carefully pinpoints Surrealism in part 4:

> It is funny I got the sea's
>
> Horizontal slightly surrealist.

The light is (has been) 'spiked'[76]: an indication, perhaps, that Graham's observations are coloured by the drugs he enjoyed which is reinforced by the final section, with its crazy circus list of performers.[77]

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[75] Arthur Edward Salmon, *Poets of the Apocalypse,* pp.18-19.
[76] 'Enter A Cloud' NCP 216, 1, last stanza.

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This is a performance in language, and, quietly, Graham disintegrates it:

> It was a cloud
>
> The language at my time's
>
> Disposal made use of.

In the end, the poet, also a performer, steps out, Dali-esque, to take a bow, listing, with Surrealist absurdity of detail '…the real ones/Who have made this possible', and thereby rendering them artificial, the product of 'making'. Acting out the performance he has himself staged, 'Nothing at all'[78], the Beckettian character which the poet ultimately reveals himself to be, can only be 'gently disintegrated' in his turn by the non-human power of language. Pressed by 'The good blue sun', he too disappears into Zennor Hill. He falls silent. Language has made use of him, as it does of time and of the cloud. And in a final twist of the Absurd, language finally reveals its dependence on silence in the closing repetition of the opening couplet: 'Gently disintegrate me/Said nothing at all'.

Here, it is worth noting Maurice Blanchot's warning, in *The Space of Literature* that automatic writing, if it 'puts us in touch with language', does so 'only at the expense of our individuality and hence of the power to

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[77] See W. S. Graham to Elizabeth Smart, in *Nightfisherman*, p. 191, regarding the supply of Methedrine. See also references to Benzedrine in letters to Sven Berlin, *Nightfisherman*, pp. 81 and 86.

[78] 'Nothing at all' also echoes Jack Kerouac: 'You know about molecules, they're made up according to a number of atoms arranged just so around a proton or something. We the just-so is falling apart. The molecule will suddenly collapse, leaving just atoms, smashed atoms of people, nothing at all' in Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture,* p.113.

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speak'.[79]   Graham's repetition (thrice) of 'Said nothing at all' in 'Enter A Cloud' could be seen as enacting just such a process.

 'Enter A Cloud' is not strictly an example of automatic writing, but shares some characteristics in that it dissociates the poet from control of its central image (the free floating, apparently spontaneous cloud), uses distorted syntax, and starts and finishes with a gnomic command which could, on one level, be said to remove the poet's free will and rob him of the power to speak except in the random speech of the 'Absurd' performer on the stage in section 5.

For the Surrealists, the Absurd was the clear voice of authenticity. It was the voice of the sub-conscious, to which automatic writing gave unmediated access.   David Nowell Smith points out[80] that automatic writing was a sufficiently important component of Graham's output for him to include it among the material he sent to Robin Skelton to be included in the archive collection of his work at the University of Victoria (Canada).[81]   Introducing the special issue of *Chicago Review* which marked the centenary of Graham's birth, and focussed particularly on Graham's unpublished output, Nowell Smith also suggests that, for all the connection of some of the material to the development of later work, this material is of a different order to Graham's published work:

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[79] Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 179.
[80] David Nowell Smith, Introduction, in *Chicago Review* p.13.
[81] Lopez, pp. 159 – 161 lists such material in that archive.

The sketches, drafts, letterpoems, as well as abstracts, landscapes and
decorated letters that are collected in this volume […] give an insight
into […] a creativity that inheres in the provisional, the occasional, the
improvisatory, where the objects produced, far from standing and not
moving, are unstable, constitutively in flux.[82]

It is beyond the scope of this study to offer an analysis of Graham's automatic
writing. What is important for this discussion is its relation to the apocalyptic
revelation of authenticity. Matthew Francis observes:

Graham's employment of automatic writing techniques places him in
a tradition, originating most importantly in Surrealism [...] The
technique of automatic writing presupposes an agency that will take
power away from the conscious mind and thus make possible
meanings that are unknown to it. Critics and artists have frequently
identified this agency with the Freudian unconscious. For Graham,
however, the agency was more often understood to be language itself,
regarded as an entity possessing superhuman powers.[83]

In introducing Graham's previously unpublished 'SYNTAX',[84] however, Eric
Powell makes a distinction between 'language' and 'speech', which also says
something about the relationship between Graham's published and
unpublished work:

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[82] David Nowell Smith, *Chicago Review* p.13.

[83] Matthew Francis, 'Syntax Gram and the Magic Typewriter: W. S. Graham's
Automatic Writing' in, *W. S. Graham: Speaking Towards You*, ed. by Ralph Pite
and Hester Jones (Liverpool : Liverpool University Press, 2004), p.86.

[84] Eric Powell, 'W. S. Graham's Syntax' in *Chicago Review*, pp. 74 – 85.

What Graham was listening to at the Atholl Arms[85] was not speech per se […] but rather language itself; he heard these 'shapes of language' not as vessels of meaning, but already as the stuff of poetry.[86]

Despite the apparent randomness of, for instance, the opening sentence:

Bullhidy blacksack from out flew the night lift over my own lost hide and seeking kneecap blazing across the waning host but becomes a moon.

Powell suggests that 'SYNTAX' might be a more rigorous endeavour than it first seems,'[87] He notes the work's complex syntactical map and also refers to the intentional 'distortion of mathematical grammar' discussed by Graham in pages addressed to Bryan Wynter in a Notebook, dated 19 November 1958.[88]

Robert Graves, too, sheds an interesting light on the question of authenticity and automatic writing. Referring in *The White Goddess* to trance-inducing herbs, 'magic mushrooms', or the whispering of the Muse in sacred tree-tops, he observes:

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[85] *Notes*, p. 381.
[86] Powell, 'Syntax' *Chicago Review,* p. 80.
[87] Powell, 'Syntax', pp. 76-77.
[88] *Nightfisherman*, p. 162.

Nowadays poets seldom use […] artificial aids to inspiration […] But a good many of the charlatans or weaklings resort to automatic writing and Spiritism. The ancient Hebrew distinction between legitimate and illegitimate prophecy … has much to recommend it. If a prophet went into a trance and was afterwards unconscious of what he had been babbling, that was illegitimate; but if he remained in possession of his critical faculties throughout the trance and afterwards, that was legitimate. His powers were heightened by the 'spirit of prophecy' …; but he was, by the grace of God, the sturdy author and regulator of this achievement.[89]

As mentioned above, Graham did indeed use 'artificial aids to inspiration'. On 7 March 1949, while struggling with 'The Nightfishing', he wrote to Sven Berlin to thank him for sending 'the white friends' (Benzedrine tablets), revealing, *inter alia*, that automatic creativity was not only an attempt to contact language at its deepest, most autonomous level. It was also connected with 'vision':

In spells of the poetry I've been trying some drawing. Only to help me to see better. Some strange faces appeared. A few allegorical drawings though Christ knows what they say. One automatic drawing of 2 figures. … Strange. It was really automatic – fast, calligraphic and I

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[89] *The White Goddess,* p. 441.

didn't seem to be thinking of anything […] Some fierce faces appear from my pen.[90]

Writing to the artist on 12 March 1949, Graham expands on his interest in automatic drawing as the visual manifestation of the subconscious, asking:

Can you say anything about 'automatic drawing'? Have any established artists done it? Yourself? Results?[91]

We do not know the answer to that question, but what follows gives an insight into the dynamic relationships between vision and language, perception and intention. The letter continues:

An idea I had. To write a poem about some object in the kitchen here….And to see how the writing of the poem changes the object so that a week after writing it maybe the object will be related to me in a significance out of all proportion to the significance of other objects in the room […] It would be even more interesting if I lived in a cottage like Bryan's [ie Bryan Wynter]. I could write something about the cromlech – which one can see from the cottage all the time – and see how it changed. I can see me writing on all the rocks and 'druid rocks' around there and be frightened to go out.[92]

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[90] *Nightfisherman*, p. 83.
[91] *Nightfisherman*, p. 85.
[92] *Nightfisherman*, p.85.

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Graham seeks 'truth' in the sense attributed by Heidegger to Heraclitus, as the 'unhidden', an essential attribute of the reality of being, rather than as a fixed and verifiable account. [93] This is significant in understanding him as an apocalyptic poet. Unlike Yeats's experience, accessed through the automatic writing of his wife and codified in *A Vision,* his interest is not in uncovering systems of esoteric meaning or universal truth. The reference to Bryan Wynter's cottage in the quotation above is significant; like the artist, Graham seeks to experience the 'innocent eye' in the flash of unintellectualized perception, however complex its relationship with subsequent work may be.

'Enter A Cloud' was first published in the *Malahat Review* in January 1975[94]. This was the month of Bryan Wynter's death[95], but the painter was very much alive when the poem was being written. Exhibition notes at Tate St Ives say of him:

> Wynter's work and development toward abstraction really evolved out of his initial interest in Surrealism and a Neo-Romantic approach to landscape, rather than the Constructivism of St Ives artists such as Nicholson, Hepworth and Gabo.

> Influenced by writers such as Carl Jung, Henri Bergson, Robert Graves and Aldous Huxley, Wynter was interested in the idea that he could free his art from conscious will. He held the essentially

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[93] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth:* p. 11.
[94] *Malahat Review*, no.33, January 1975 pp. 112-15.
[95] Bryan Wynter died on 11 January 1975.

romantic view that somehow he could explore and recreate the innocence of nature and an innocence of vision.[96]

The painters Peter Lanyon and Bryan Wynter shared with Graham a perception of landscape in flux, a landscape which, no matter how marked by history, habitation, or geographical features, is itself in process, moving and changing before, but also because of, the seeing eye of the artist. The spaces Graham constructs are often stages for performances which are similar in many respects to the enactment of changing perception presented to viewers of Wynter's IMOOS (Images Moving Out Onto Space'.[97] That Graham saw, admired, but wrestled in language with Wynter's artistic aims is explicit in 'Wynter And The Grammarsow' (NCP 184) where he addresses:

> Bryan the Spinner
>
> In endless eddies
>
> Above the weir
>
> Of rushing home.
>
> Fibre-glass swiveller
>
> Over the weaving
>
> Strands of water

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[96] Notes for Teachers' in exhibition notes for *Bryan Wynter A Selected Retrospective*, Tate St Ives, 15 September – 2 December 2001.

[97] 'Using a parabolic mirror,[Wynter] would hang contrasting pairs of painted shapes, which rotated freely. Their reversed reflections enlarged, appearing to move in opposite directions.'
https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/bryan-wynter-2176

> In an innocent pool.
>
> […]
>
> Sound a Wyntermade
>
> Disturbance of what
>
> We expect light to do.
>
> Hold it Hold it CUT

The poem itself is in constant motion, swerving through the titles Graham calls down upon Wynter, to the sound of 'the water organ/of the Greek' – the flux of Heraclitus. But it does so at the bidding of the overtly artificial persona of the film director, calling for 'sound' and 'cut' to project the performance of the poem onto his presentation of Wynter as 'King in the making/Of what your subjects have never seen'. Within it, our perception flows, as do the light effects of Wynter's IMOOS, through the painter's engagement with the natural environment, but also through the effects achieved by the will of his eye and skill of his hand, the ways in which these interact with the form of the poem, and the way in which that moves, in its turn, under the eye of 'the director', who cannot escape the reality of this relationship, which only his deployment of language can create here.

The question of *process*, of transformation, underlies the notion of apocalypse. It is intrinsic also to the relationship between the artist, the art object, and the onlooker and a close look at the language in this poem, reinforced by the artificial persona of the 'director', with his controlling voice, indicates that, however revelatory the results, the process epitomises

the problem of art. The epithets applied to Wynter hint at very mixed feelings about this process: 'Bryan the Spinner', the 'fibre-glass swiveller' who projects effects onto 'an innocent pool' to achieve 'a Wyntermade/Disturbance of what/We expect light to do.' Graham is ambivalent, too, about the legitimacy of the outcome:

> Maybe in a kind
>
> Of way it is legitimate to let
>
> One's self be added to, to be moved
>
> By both at once, by the idea
>
> Of the person, and the object
>
> Adrift stationary in its Art law.

In the end, neither landscape nor vision remains innocent once it is seen through the eye of the artist.

This chapter aimed to summarise the principal poetic influences on W. S. Graham in relation to apocalyptic themes and devices. Seen through the lens of *The White Goddess,* myth gives him access to the very origins of poetry; the prism of the New Apocalyptics offers a glimpse of the poet as saviour and saved; he shares with Modernism the use of simultaneity to refashion the now with all its connections and potential, and with Modernity the transformative power of the image which negates stasis. Graham's pursuit of authenticity through Surrealism, the Absurd and experiments with automatic writing brings into the mix the questionable

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relationship between art and 'truth' or the 'real'. This lies at the heart of the discussion of Graham as an apocalyptic poet and it is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Landscapes, dreamscapes, and the art of 'truth'

> It's lying low, the sun,
>
> shooting horizontal rays from just behind the hill through
> ranks
>
> of trees stamped on the sky
>
> peeling at the edges
>
> of peripheral vision
>
> > (*Peripheral Visions*: from
> >
> > 'Seven Peripheral Visions' 2)

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The task of apocalypse is to reveal a truth. In 'Enter a Cloud' (NCP 216) Graham approaches the paradoxical relationship between art and truth through the vision of a cloud crossing a sunny landscape. Within this, two narratives operate. In the first, using topography as a metaphor for language, we follow the process of realisation impressed on the cloud by the locations it encounters and the people who see it. This cloud, despite 'not wanting to be a symbol', represents the poem, which is defined by its readers and must make its transient way against the constant pressure of silence, established through the triple repetition of the phrase 'said nothing at all'. In the second narrative, the poet, having fallen, finds himself 'lying' in a 'bower of bramble', a literary location which is contrasted with the

landscapes of medieval dream poems to emphasise the problematic 'lie' of the art to which he has given himself.

Graham, as already observed, resisted the idea of myth as 'the projection of self' but he was certainly aware of the power of myth and memory held within the landscapes on which he drew. As apocalyptic 'dream' poems demonstrate, topography is an essential theme in apocalyptic literature. It consists of the features which inform a detailed process of 'thinking through place'. These comprise a complex network of locations, distinguished by particularity, historical, cultural or mythological resonance, which is not restricted to physical or geographical features. These locations, which can be 'real' or imagined, embody the action of the plot, just as, in 'Enter A Cloud', the cloud, 'Not wanting to be a symbol' nonetheless carries the action of the poem across a land and seascape which, in part 3, define its 'changing messages', despite the reiteration of 'Said nothing at all' with which Graham opens that section. 'Jean', who looks 'Abstractedly out through/ Her Hampstead glass' cannot see that 'This cloud has been thought of/And written on Zennor Hill' because abstraction is a withdrawal from the concrete, individual process of realisation impressed by location on the cloud.

The location is a threatening one. The industrialised landscapes of Clydeside and Cornwall which are so often Graham's metaphors for language are, as it is, 'scored and impressed by the commotion of us all'.[98]

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[98] *Nightfisherman*, p. 383.

At the same time, they are neither passive nor pastoral. Zennor Hill is a harsh environment; dominant, but at the mercy of the wind and weather off the Atlantic. It is an unpredictable place. Mist obscures it in seconds. And it is crowned with the ruins of an ancient settlement. According to Robert Graves,[99] the White Goddess rules all important hills and mountains, and her presence can be sensed in Graham's poetic relationship to Zennor Hill, which is also reminiscent of that of Somers with the same hill in D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*:

> He would go out into the blackness of night and listen to the blackness, and call, call softly, for the spirits, the presences he felt coming downhill from the moors in the night.

> And then the Cornish night would gradually come down upon the dark, shaggy moors, that were like the fur of some beast, and upon the pale-grey granite masses, so ancient and Druidical.

> The old Celtic countries have never had our Latin-teutonic consciousness, never will have. They have never been Christian, in the blue-eyed, or even in the truly Roman, Latin sense of the word. But they have been overlaid by our consciousness and our civilisation, smouldering underneath in a slow, eternal fire, that you can never put out till it burns itself out.[100]

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[99] *The White Goddess*, p. 340.
[100] D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 226, 237, 238.

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I have alluded above, in the context of automatic writing and the voice of the unconscious, to the two juxtaposed one-line statements with which the poem begins and ends. In the first instance, the opening line could be the plea of a lover, or that of a prisoner: 'Gently disintegrate me'. The second line, 'Said nothing at all', a hand clamped over his mouth, is also an order to the poet, whose task is to disintegrate silence. But, as the reiteration of 'Said nothing at all' at the start of part 3 reveals, silence does not go away. By the time we reach the final two lines, which appear to repeat the opening couplet, we realise that, this time, they report some instructions: 'Gently disintegrate me/ Said nothing at all.' The cloud has gone. This has been a performance by language, necessarily a temporary and unstable reality. Once the stage is dismantled, disintegrated, however, nothing, silence, the dark companion, is revealed.

Graham's vision in 'Enter a Cloud' appears, at first sight, to be straightforward: the sea is a 'simple sea'; the cloud 'proceeds with no idea/ Of destination'; Albert Strick, busy in his garden, stops and waves like a child at a train. But note Graham's use of the word 'teeling', a Cornish word which can mean to plant or sow, but can also mean to set or 'teel a trap'[101].   However much Graham may have wanted access to the unmediated vision of the innocent eye, 'Enter A Cloud' is a very knowing poem, which uses the landscape to create an imaginary scene which denies resolution. Albert Strick may stop and wave, but what at? The sky is in fact empty as Graham clearly tells us: 'The cloud is not there yet'. A new order

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[101] *OED*, 'till, v.¹', 4,7.

may be revealed in the end, but it is one in which access is blocked at every turn by an emphasis on the imaginative nature of the scene, which communicates both presence and absence. Words may be at the disposal of the poet, but, just as the imaginary cloud is, in part 4, 'going beyond/what I can see or make', this landscape is the territory of language.

3.1 Lying in the bower of bramble

The poet places himself within this scene as an *accidental* spectator; he has not, it seems, chosen his vantage point. He has – literally - fallen into contemplation of the sky. Matthew Francis makes much of the theme of falling in Graham's work:

> The ideal communities of the past are forever inaccessible. Because they are a kind of Eden, we are separated from them by the Fall. 'Fall', in fact, is a favourite verb of Graham's, one whose symbolic resonance is not always apparent. 'Enter a Cloud', for example, depicts the poet 'lying/In a bower of bramble/Into which I have fallen', which sounds matter-of-fact enough (NCP 216). This accident seems to be the same one he describes in 'Dear Who I Mean' as 'the lonely stumble/In the spiked bramble', where the adjective hints that the fall referred to may have a deeper meaning (NCP 160). The same phrase, 'lonely stumble', occurs in the early poem 'Soon To Be Distances' (NCP 34). Certainly the image of a trip or stumble suggests that the poet may be to blame for it, since

the same words are often used of wrongdoings. The Christian terminology associated with loss of grace has a euphemistic character which can prove invaluable to those hesitating between guilt and self-exculpation: the words enable Graham to accept the blame and deny it simultaneously.

The sin responsible for this stumble is writing, which has separated him from his family both symbolically, […] and pragmatically, because he has to abandon the values of his family in order to practise it. To be in language is to fall down to the level of the page.

The Fall, being mythical, is not merely an event in time, an allegorical rendering of a particular biographical incident – it is re-enacted in every poem, since to write words is to cause them to fall from the air to the page, from the live world of speech to the dead world of writing.[102]

What Francis means by 'mythical' here is uncertain. It seems appropriate to this poem to take it to mean a truth beyond 'reality', accessed in the 'other world' of the imagination.

Certainly, the sin of choosing to write, with the resulting exclusion from Eden, is a factor, but it is possible to read Graham's 'fall' in a more nuanced way.

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[102] *Where The People Are*, pp. 43, 45.

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Fittingly for a poem built on an experience of the Cornish landscape, the strata in the few lines which describe the poet's fall are dense and complex. On one level, Graham's clowning syntax simply evokes his refusal to give up the struggle to get words out in the process of falling:

> Is there still time to say
>
> Said I myself lying
>
> In a bower of bramble,
>
> Into which I have fallen.

There is a hint of bumbling Winnie-the-Pooh in the first two lines, an artlessness reminiscent of Bryan Wynter's 'innocent' morning eye'[103] (Wynter liked to hang up his current work where it would be the first thing his innocent, morning eye encountered). But the reader is brought up sharply against the word 'lying' – the equivocal enjambement with which Graham tips himself into a literary bower, and which takes us to another sort of reality as, from this prone position, we look up through his eyes

> At blue with not anything
>
> We could have ever arranged
>
> Slowly taking place.

This is the lie into which Graham has fallen. And here, as in 'The Night City', we find both echoes and contrasts with the moral landscape of the

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[103] See stanza 2 in 'Five Visitors To Madron' (NCP 189) for Graham's return to this image.

medieval dream vision, with Will, in the bright May morning at the very start of *Piers Plowman*, 'tired out after wandering astray', fallen into a dream as he rests 'under a spacious bank beside a stream.'[104] Or with the *Pearl* poet, dreaming in the garden 'green with herbs',[105] as his spirit is led by Fortune to the banks of the stream, which the dreamer is forbidden to cross, to a vision of his Pearl and the paradise of purity beyond.[106] For Graham, the dream, the vision experienced while 'lying' in his particular bramble bower, which purports to show 'not anything/we could ever have arranged,' is implicitly contrasted with those dreams, which are designed to provide a platform for 'right vision'. Graham's vision is revealed to be a lie. He makes it very clear that this is an imagined cloud, '…thought of/and written on Zennor Hill.' Like anything from the territory of the imagination, it is a shape-shifter, with no 'true' self, no 'true' shape, its appearance being defined by an imagined response to an imagined sea, light, wind, the formation of the land (see part 2).

3.2 The symbol and the 'uncreated reality'

Writing to Edwin Morgan in April 1949, Graham says:

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[104] William Langland, *Piers Plowman*, trans. by A. V. C. Schmidt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, this edn. World's Classics paperback, 1992), p. 1.
[105] *Pearl,* trans. by Simon Armitage (London: Faber and Faber Limited, paperback edn. 2017), 1, 4, p. 6.

Art can not be fake. It either unites with us to our advantage or doesn't unite with us at all. By 'to our advantage' I mean to our enlargement of spirit.[107]

In the introduction to his translation of *Piers Plowman*, A. V. C. Schmidt summarises the relationship between Langland, the reader and the form of the poem in somewhat similar terms:

Piers Plowman constitutes an artistic adventure not only for the author but also for the *reader*, who is required to participate in its quest for wholeness of spiritual understanding, which is at the same time an effort to achieve integrity of poetic form.[108]

In *Pearl*, or *Piers Plowman*, as in *Revelation*, the poet does not claim to be the author of the message itself. The message comes from another world and is mediated by supernatural messenger or experienced in a dream. The poet's role is that of the prophet who relays what has been revealed, and, because the narrative is a version, a reiteration of a familiar message, those who receive it already know how to accept the vision and its message. Despite their obvious deployment by the author, stylistic devices give the work status above and outside the everyday; they give authority to the poet's account. Langland and his readers shared a 'sacramental' perception which, Schmidt observes, also finds in the material creation an uncreated reality to which 'things', properly interpreted, can guide us.

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[107] *Nightfisherman*, p.94
[108] *Piers Plowman*, p. xxv.

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He continues:

> The aim of both wisdom and art, therefore, is to affirm the *signacula*
>
> so that inner and outer correspond, face reveals heart, and existence
>
> is a showing-forth of essence.[109]

It is easy to be taken in by the evocation in 'Enter a Cloud' of 'the sailing afternoon' the poet spends amid the foxgloves and bracken, but there is no reliable correspondence between inner and outer; things are not what they seem: these plants are the symbols of nature's reclamation of the industrial landscape man has abandoned.[110] As symbols they do not correspond with expectation; they reveal difference and the scene Graham depicts is, inescapably, 'other'. It has been 'arranged', an artefact, made by the poet, 'language […] arranged to in its turn impress significantly for the benefit of each individual.'[111] Graham's 'disclaimer' that the cloud is just a cloud, 'Not wanting to be a symbol,' is more than slightly tongue in cheek; this cloud *is* a symbol. But it does not guide us, as Schmidt says of Langland's 'sacramental' vision, to an 'uncreated' reality: the cloud signifies language, which creates the landscape as it floats along just as the movement of the words on the page creates the poem. The sacramental sensibility believes in the reality of what is revealed symbolically. Graham negates this in the very description of the cloud's journey out of sight, which references that of

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[109] *Piers Plowman*, pp. xxxix - xl.

[110] This is a symbol to which Graham returns again and again, and which he associates explicitly with the death of Bryan Wynter in 'Two Poems on Zennor Hill' (NCP209), and in 'Dear Bryan Wynter', where the foxglove stands alone, in a landscape abandoned by the dead artist (NCP 258-260), whose eye no longer gives it life.

[111] *Notes*, p. 383.

Coleridge in 'This Lime-tree Bower my Prison', in being a journey specifically of the poet's imagination, emphasising the created nature of the subject and the absence of the object. Language, as Graham depicts it in the poem, is autonomous; the cloud will move beyond what the poet can see or make. But the autonomy of language is compromised not only by its reception, but by the intention of the poet. Despite Graham's assertion that 'the poem is more than the poet's intention,'[112] it is possible to understand this in terms of Existentialism's definition of the imagination as the highest form of human intentionality, which accommodates the real and the virtual, the present and the absent:

> The freedom that characterises human subjectivity is manifested most vividly in a specific type of intentionality: the imagining of an object. Imagination exemplifies the power of human consciousness because it is a type of intentionality that posits in the same act both the existence of the object and its inexistence, since it "intends" it precisely as a virtual object. In imagination, the object is indeed intended by consciousness, but "as absent", as "containing a certain part of nothingness" inasmuch as it is posited as not existing here and now [….] This distinguishes it from the type of intentionality involved in perception, one of the key aspects of which is precisely the positing of its object as existent.'[113]

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[112] *Notes*, p. 380.

[113] Jean-Philippe Deranty, 'Existentialist Aesthetics', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. by Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2015), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/aesthetics-existentialist

In Chapter 1, 'apocalypses' were described as works of the imagination. The reality they posit does not exist in the here and now. Their intention is to posit it as a 'virtual object', but the vision must have credibility as a future reality. Similarly, although for Graham the imagination is his refuge and his 'implement', the reality of the poem as a place of becoming is critical. This chapter has explored the ways in which he understands artifice as destabilising that reality, not only because words fall to their death on the page but because it exposes how the creative process exists only in its negative of 'art', in as perilous a way as language exists on its negative, silence.

The chapter which follows takes up this theme of language and silence in a discussion of Graham's approach to the traditional apocalyptic journey. It explores in particular the problematic question of home-coming in 'The Nightfishing' and 'The Stepping Stones'.

Chapter 4: The 'not-at-home' and some apocalyptic journeys

> I shall come back
>
> tick tapping
>
> a martial cane
>
> tripping
>
> through scar tissue
>
> (Peripheral Visions: *Cloud Chamber*, 7)

<center>*   *   *</center>

Apocalyptic literature often employs the narrative of the transformative voyage. For Graham, it is an important device, often linked to perceptions of his own identity. The journeys in 'The Stepping Stones' (NCP 235) and 'The Nightfishing' (NCP 105) address this theme, but they diverge from the traditional paradigm by denying a homecoming to the journeying poet. 'The Constructed Space' (NCP 161) expresses this inevitable exile in the poet's withdrawal from communication into the abstraction of making.

4.1 The 'not-at-home'

In the course of his analysis of 'The Nightfishing', Tony Lopez places Graham in

> The tradition […] which begins with Homer, and which is extended
>
> by many works whose basis is a voyage or quest into the unknown,

where trials are suffered, and where the resolution of the narrative involves changes in the perception of the protagonist, whose new self finally comes home. [114]

And, in 'The Nightfishing', as he points out, the instability of the protagonist's perception of self is worked out through the instability of language:

The language of description is subject to the same flux as the perceptions it seeks to record [...] This notion of speaking 'concretely' from a fluid identity is a main theme or precondition of much of Graham's work. Sometimes […] it is the explicit subject, but more often it accounts for the way in which the writing proceeds.'[115]

The instability of language is made apparent from the start of 'The Nightfishing' in a range of recognisably apocalyptic techniques, notably the dialogue of past, present, and future tenses, and the echo, the other-worldly message, which, siren-like, shadows that of the poet, calling him into its power:

I'm come to this place

(Come to this place)

Which I'll not pass

[114] Lopez, p. 63.
[115] Lopez, p. 62.

[…]

Yet this place finds me

And forms itself again.

This present place found me.[116]

In 'The Stepping Stones', the traditional concept of the voyage is domesticated; Graham adapts it to the description of a journey on a quite different scale. The domestication does not, however, imply a safe homecoming since, again, the poem is concerned with language. It acquires an association with darkness and disruption before it even starts, because of the lurking presence of Roger Hilton. Not only is it placed immediately before Graham's elegy for Roger Hilton, 'Lines on Roger Hilton's Watch' (NCP 235), but, in the stepping stones it also picks up an image from a letter written by Graham to Hilton in 1969:

What do you think is to happen to you? What have you in mind? Trying to answer the same question myself I do not know I do not know. Walking on the little stepping stones of momentary elation across the terrible chasm of Nothing, I try to walk assured and keep my balance and not look down. REALITY … is a ghost world with insistent affection for the man it hunts, who tries to get away.[117]

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[116] *'The Nightfishing'*, NCP 105, section 1, lines 7 -9, 19 – 21.
[117] *Nightfisherman*, p. 230.

In engaging with what it meant to be a poet, Graham grappled with metaphysics, with the possibility of a reality beyond himself and underlying the words he uses as a poet. In a letter to Sven Berlin, dated 12 March 1949, he anticipated the concerns which surface more cogently in his later work (see my discussion of, for instance, 'The Dark Dialogues' on pp. 161- 62).

> The idea of 'the ghostly constant'. If there is such a thing imaginable to any concrete degree. And its relation to all that flows over it. I am a river flowing past a point, not the man I was a second ago, but what is the point? What is the one me?[118]

As the emphasis on performance in Graham's work demonstrates, there is no 'one me'. The poems discussed here address the theme of homecoming and the poem as the place of 'becoming'. But given the instability of language, it is not the poem which is 'the point' over which all flows. The 'ghostly constant' makes its presence felt in a number of guises in Graham's poetry, but its character is most powerfully evoked as 'the Beast' which is the silence, revealed by the apocalyptic charge of language as the negative, the 'nothing'. This is the reality which 'hunts' the poet, who must negotiate, on such perilous stepping stones, the 'chasm of nothing' which is its lair. Calvin Bedient observes that:

> The young Graham called silence his 'master'. A cruel master, standing for a 'suiciding principle (NCP 60). To be is to speak, speak

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[118] *Nightfisherman*, p. 4.

something, be present in language; to listen to one's own speech, in autorealization […] But is the silence just the negative of expression? Is there something 'in' it? Is silence primal? Profound? Shallow? Potentially fecund? Or even complicit with the Freudian 'father's "no"'? Does it 'sleep' in language the way Graham said his 'father's ego' slept in him? (NCP 241).[119]

In Graham's work, silence can be identified as all these things. The question here is whether it is an allegorical trope representing the constant jeopardy of poetic communication, or whether Graham really believed in it as an other-worldly being. Poetry for him was the realisation of self; it was not something separate, and it seems that while the 'beast' may be a metaphorical personification in his poetry, silence as an other-worldly being is a real and menacing power.

In 'The Stepping Stones', the man whom reality hunts is, it seems, simply trying to 'walk across the shires' – a refuge he has created in order to hide away from 'my true people and all/I can't put easily into my life.' This sounds straightforward enough, despite the implicit suggestion that there is an alternative reality on offer which is both more difficult and somehow more 'true' than the life he has constructed for himself. He is trying to traverse the shires, just as words must pass across the constructed space to an uncertain reception. However challenging it may be, the alternative reality is presented in the final stanza as home. It is very present to the

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[119] Calvin Bedient, 'W. S. Graham, Dramatist of the Beast in Language' in *Chicago Review,* p. 145.

protagonist in its absence and, as its people are described as 'true', suggests a co-existent reality to that of the poem.

The protagonist is, however,

> stepping on
> The stones between the runnels getting
> Nowhere nowhere

Typically, through that repetition Graham alerts us to the 'now here' which constitutes the word 'nowhere' and in doing so emphasises the impossibility of movement. Stepping stones, we also note, change and interrupt the flow of a stream, as an image interrupts the flow of time, but they do not stop its inexorable progress.

The protagonist, moreover, announces right at the start that he has his yellow boots on. Taken out of context, this detail seems insignificant, but Lavinia Singer notes that

> Graham uses color with care and in his Kandinsky ribbon drafts he names just one: the ribbons of weed have yellow follicles. Kandinsky describes both the warmth and disturbing influence of

yellow, its movement 'of approach to the spectator' and 'of

overspreading […] boundaries.'[120]

Yellow is also, though, associated with homecoming, being the colour of the ribbons used to welcome soldiers home from war and the poet has these boots on to 'walk home, across the shires.' So where, and what, actually, is 'home'?

In *The Duino Elegies*, Rilke says: 'We are not at home, not reliably, in the interpreted world'.[121] In 'The Stepping Stones', in order for the poet to go 'home', someone or something must first take his hand and

pull me over from

The last stone on to the moss and

The three celandines.

Moss, notoriously slippery, covers and stifles. Celandine's low growth disguises the menace of its underground tubers. It 'colonises disturbed soil'.[122] The poet is pulled over onto a bank, a location reminiscent, as

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[120] Lavinia Springer, 'Significant Shapes: W. S. Graham's Painting Poems' in *Chicago Review*, p. 62

[121] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. by David Oswald (Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 1992), p. 27.

[122] The Royal Horticultural Society website describes the lesser celandine as a weed which 'grows from root tubers and spreads mainly by tubercles (bulbils) that […] can be a real menace in some situations. Control is difficult due to the short growing season and the persistence of the root tubers'.

already noted, of those in the medieval dream visions,[123] but all the indications are that this bank is not going to be the starting point for any new order, or vision of paradise. This is capture, not an escape, and the apparent rescuer is characterised by the hidden movement, the dark possessiveness underlying language, which is the ruler of 'the interpreted world'. Juxtaposed on these images, the invitation at the end of 'The Stepping Stones': 'Now my dear/Let us go home across the shires' becomes sinister, the voice of the fairy-tale witch, from whom there is no escape.

It is tempting to ascribe the threat in this situation 'simply' to the beast in the chasm and to language, its servant, as the power which has captured the poet and imprisoned him in 'the shires', preventing him from ever going home to his true people. But the notion of 'home' is a problematic one for poets. With reference to 'late Modernism', Anthony Mellors point to

> recognition of self-loss as a necessary condition for any 'divine sense' of being in the world […] The only hope of returning 'home' is, paradoxically, to keep on the move, understanding that the nostalgia for origins is always already a temporal dislocation. […] awareness of mortality necessitates the recognition that the not-at-home-to-itself is a condition of becoming at home.[124]

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[123] This is a recurring image in Graham's work and always indicative of discomfort and instability; see, for instance, my comments above on its use in 'The Night City' and 'Enter A Cloud'.

[124] Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: from Pound to Prynne*, pp. 9 – 10. Mellors is referring to J. H. Prynne, but the observation is also relevant to Graham.

Thus, we remain snared in the question posed at the end of section 4 of 'The Nightfishing' (NCP 105):

> What one place remains
>
> Home as darkness quickens?

In that poem, an answer is offered, but then quickly destabilised, in the metrical change at the opening of the section which follows:

> So this is the place. This
>
> Is the place fastened still with movement,
>
> Movement as calligraphic and formal as
>
> A music burned on copper.
>
> […]
>
> Here is the place no more
>
> Certain though the steep streets
>
> And High Street form again and the sea
>
> Swing shut on hinges and the doors all open wide.
>
> (NCP 117-18)

The doors are reminiscent of the 'saving seadoors' in part 1 and the 'sea-trapdoors' in part 2 of 'The White Threshold', which open onto both 'homecoming' and the depths, 'the heaving hundred weights of water', the submerged reality in which the poet must immerse himself. Likewise, in 'The Nightfishing', the seadoors swing shut at the end of the transformative

voyage, but, whatever else has been revealed in that journey, the real apocalypse lies in the fact that 'the doors all open wide' to a quotidian reality of High Street and townscape in which 'home' has, due to language, become 'the not-at-home' condition of becoming :

> This present place is
>
> Become made into
>
> A breathless still place
>
> Unrolled on a scroll[125]
>
> And turned to face this light.
>
> So I spoke and died.
>
> So within the dead
>
> Of night and the dead
>
> Of all my life those
>
> Words died and awoke.

4.2 Abstraction and the 'condition of becoming'[126]

The 'condition of becoming' is the matter of 'The Constructed Space' (NCP 161). In this poem the poet also speaks and 'dies', or at least absents himself from the words which die once fixed on the page. In its final lines

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[125] This image brings to mind the scroll with the seven seals which plays a significant part in the *Book of Revelation* V.1-14, VI. 1-17,VIII.1.
[126] Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics*, p. 10.

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the voice of the poet turns away from his address to the reader, back onto himself and situates him 'here I am/ Most truly now this abstract act become'. The act is the act of making, not of communication.

Abstraction's searing 'radical interrogation'[127] was described by Frank O'Hara as 'the construction–of-esthetic-objects movement' which 'deliberately vies with the fondness one feels for a found object, challenging in intimacy as well as structure all the autobiographical associations that a found object embodies'.[128]

Within this poem, this object, Graham uses intimacy, a device which he often employs ironically to effect just such a challenge (see, for instance, discussion below on this theme in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land'). The reader (who is of course, imaginary) is addressed, directly, 'honestly', personally, in an intimate, casual tone, by the poet who estranges himself, violently, in the last line:

> Anyhow here we are and never
>
> Before have we two faced each other
>
> […]
>
> It is like that, remember. It is like that

---

[127] Kevin Hart, *The Dark* Gaze, p. 6.

[128] Frank O'Hara, 'Art Chronicle Kulcher, Summer 1962,' in *Art Chronicles 1954 – 1966* (New York: George Braziller Inc., York, 1975), p. 8.

Very often at the beginning till we are met

By some intention risen up out of nothing.

 And even then we know what we are saying

Only when it is said and fixed and dead.

To quote O'Hara on abstraction again:[129]

out of this populated cavern of self come brilliant,

uncomfortable works, works that don't reflect you or your life,

though you can know them. Art is not *your* life, it is someone else's.

Graham puts it this way: 'From where we are it is not us we see.' [130]

this abstract scene

Stretching between us.

This is a public place

Achieved against subjective odds and then

Mainly an obstacle to what I mean.

Poetry is an object in a public place, open to all comers. Whatever 'brilliant,

uncomfortable works' emerge from Graham's 'cavern of self', they require

[129] O'Hara, *Art Chronicles*, p. 6.

[130] Tony Lopez notes of *Malcolm Mooney's Land*: ' By making us follow him on this voyage into 'language' and paradox, Graham takes us into a territory similar to that in which the abstract painters work.*' Edinburgh Review* 75, ed. by Peter Kravitz, (February 1987), pp 20, 21.

the poet to absent himself. As Graham writes in 'Hilton Abstract' (NCP 177)

> The false hands are moving round.
>
> […]
>
> Hell with this and hell with that.
>
> All that's best is better not.

What has this to do with apocalypse? 'The Constructed Space' is about the poet's perception of himself as poet, in Mellors' words, his 'condition of becoming' the authentic self. All the poems discussed in this chapter are staged events in which the poet has to be removed from the 'real' world to disclose reality. The negative charge of this revelation is that this is an inhospitable reality which has, in itself, implications for the self: not only is the poet too much changed by his exposure to language and its alien silence to return 'home', but he has somehow to integrate that experience. At its simplest, the positive charge lies in the revelation of abstraction, an isolated, severe place, as the place of making, rather than of communication, as Graham's 'real' place of becoming.

The following chapter takes up this theme, returning too to the theme of 'the ghostly constant' and relating them to Graham's treatment of the fundamental apocalyptic themes of catastrophe and judgement.

Chapter 5: Catastrophe and Judgement

From up here on the terrace

the eye takes in

a cockshift combine

harvester aided by hillside levelling

technology and bale deflectors

string-tied tramps close up   slicing decreasing squares

growling bottle mouths   down to spiteful stubble

dirty sacking finger

prints slip on the wet lips   red riding hood trips into the wood

of words I know the names   all on a summer's day

of the days whisper

Monday Tuesday Wednesday   see how she runs!

full of woe

put a hand halt on the reel

(*Peripheral Visions*: 'Occipital Outcome', Reel 1)

*   *   *

Traditionally, the driving theme of apocalypse is not catastrophe but judgement, based on the revelation of an alternative version of 'reality' in which a critique of that which it replaces is implicit. Catastrophe is, however, usually intrinsic to the action. It takes two forms: first, it is experienced in the

situation from which apocalypse promises escape; second, the negative critique of judgement carries with it at least the threat of violent, punitive, destruction of the status quo. I shall address the more positive aspects of revelation in Graham's work below. In this chapter, my main focus will be on the 'judgement' delivered in the title poem of the 1970 collection *Malcolm Mooney's Land.* First, however, I shall address the themes of catastrophe and judgement which run through the the collection as a whole.

5.1 *Malcolm Mooney's Land*: the collection

> When who we think we are is suddenly
>
> Flying apart, splintered into
>
> Acts we hardly recognize
>
> [….]
>
> I hope
>
> A value is there lurking somewhere.
>
> 'The Fifteen Devices' (NCP 183)

In considering the apocalyptic character of *Malcolm Mooney's Land*, Graham's place in his own times is significant. His career was pursued against the backdrop of a fundamental existential insecurity and he was not immune to this. Like Eliot after World War 1, he was a post-war poet. As already noted, he blamed Christianity for the barbarism of war and

excoriated it in the imagery of 'The White Threshold'(NCP 92). The image of the Holocaust undercuts the literary preoccupations of 'Malcolm Mooney's Land'(NCP 153), and that catstrophic theme permeates 'Ten Shots Of Mister Simpson' (NCP 210) in *Implements In Their Places*. The post-World War II era also meant coming to terms with the 'bomb culture' of the 1950s and 1960s; it is not difficult to place 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', the poem, against the backdrop of a nuclear winter, while the Trident missile base at Loch Long on the Clyde makes an appearance in 'Clusters Travelling Out' (NCP 191). The threat of apocalyptic catastrophe hangs in the air and, far from being isolated from the wider world, Graham constructs locations in this collection which are in tune with the shifting, sometimes conflicting, instabilities of his time, as well as with his own understanding of what it is to be a poet.

While, in some poems in this collection, these locations are recognisable, they are not simply sites in his personal search for identity and community. While Matthew Francis argues cogently that 'for Graham both language and art stand or fall by their ability or inability to express love,'[131] these locations are, increasingly, sites for the expression of fragmentation and alienation. Calvin Bedient observes that:

> Graham is the least confessional of poets who divulge their plight. He used allegory to raise himself above the literally and directly personal into what he called the 'abstract', that is, the existential-

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[131] *Where The People Are*, p. 29.

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universal. The poems that face onto the void of silence and the inevitable distortions of readers […] obviously exempt themselves from suggesting a real 'place or atmosphere' (NF, 142-43).[132]

In those poems where Graham evokes 'real' locations most vividly and accurately, such as the list of specific features in the landscape of 'The Thermal Stair'(NCP 163) or the poignant domestic details in part 2 of 'The Dark Dialogues'(NCP 168), it is as a point of reference or contrast, and his aim is not to evoke a shared experience, presence, but to amplify an acute expression of absence, of the impossibility of intimacy, in contrast to the particularity of location. Those he names in his poems are also absent; they exist as memories, quotations, myths, dreams, the dead. When he addresses 'real' people, such as Nessie Dunsmuir, in 'I Leave This At Your Ear' (NCP 166), he is absent, she is sleeping, he leaves a note for a dreamer. He writes. He does not speak.

Graham's poetry may not be confessional, but the catastrophe and implicit judgement which are the subject of this chapter are not restricted to external circumstances. The cost to Graham of being a poet was high, and this collection, while avoiding the personal, strikes a moral tone in questioning the value of that enterprise. Because being a poet is existential for Graham those questions inevitably imply judgement of value of the self which is realised in poetry, and of the possibility of meaning in view of the apparent impossibility of communication through language. This theme can be

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[132] Calvin Bedient, *Chicago Review*, p. 150.

traced throughout the collection, but, leaving aside for now the title poem, emerges particularly strongly in 'The Dark Dialogues'(NCP 167), 'Approaches To How They Behave' (NCP 178), 'The Fifteen Devices' (NCP 183), or 'Five Visitors to Madron'(NCP 188).

In the opening section of 'The Dark Dialogues' Graham, picking up the theme expressed with optimism, albeit bleakly, in 'The Constructed Space,' (NCP 161) hopes, of his words, that

> for a moment
> They will become for me
> A place I can think in
> And think anything in,
> An aside from the monstrous.

Graham is typically ambiguous here. Is it language or silence which is the 'monstrous' from which he wishes to turn his thoughts aside? Or is it that his words will become a place he can think anything in, even think an 'aside' from the 'monstrous'? It is, of course, all of these: the poem picks its perilous way across the 'terrible chasm of nothing' referred to in Graham's letter to Roger Hilton. Being nothing, meaningless, silence has already been established as the dark companion of language, and contrasts throughout this poem with the nostalgic domestic settings in which the 'children' who are his words breathe and turn over, hide and seek, and cry

'come out/Come out whoever you are' to his inchoate self, until the place
moves

> Beyond the reach of any
>
> Word. Only the dark
>
> Dialogues drew their breath.

The collection is alive with the sense of this enigmatic 'other' presence. It is
summed up in stanza 6 of 'Approaches To How They Behave' (NCP 178):

> The dark companion is a star
>
> Very present like a dark poem
>
> Far and unreadable just out
>
> At the edge of this poem floating.
>
> It is not more or less a dark
>
> Companion poem to the poem.

While Graham does not always differentiate between the autonomy of
language and the threat of silence, the emphasis here on darkness suggests
silence, the negative: this is a 'dark' star, and, again, the Holocaust victims,
with their stars of David, are present. In his 1958 speech on being awarded
the Bremen prize, Paul Celan describes his own poetry as:

> the efforts of someone who, overarced by stars that are human
>
> handiwork, and who, shelterless in this till now undreamt-of sense

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and thus most uncannily in the open, goes with his very being to language, stricken by and seeking reality.[133]

In this collection, we also, though, become very conscious of ourselves as 'Other', as visitors from another world. We are the unknown readers in stanza 12 of 'Approaches To How They Behave' (NCP 181) whose imagination raises the ghost life of the poem from the words on the 'dead-still page':

> The words are mine. The thoughts are all
>
> Yours as they occur behind
>
> The bat of your vast unseen eyes.
>
> These words are as you see them put
>
> Down on the dead-still page.

The 'Other' is evoked, too, as the negative, the reverse of language, which is the white surface on which the poet makes his marks, and which he must 'construct … first/ To speak out on' ('Approaches To How They Behave', stanza 15, NCP 178). We are also, moreover, conscious of the 'Other' as absence; not simply the palpable loss expressed in, for instance, Graham's elegy for Peter Lanyon, 'The Thermal Stair' (NCP163), but also the absence of achievable coherence expressed in his treatment of time and place, particularly in part 4 of 'The Dark Dialogues':

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[133] Paul Celan, 'Speech on the occasion of receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen' trs. by John Felstiner, in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 2001) p.395

And there are other times.

But the times are always

Other

[…]

What if the terrible times

Moving away to find

Me in the end only

Staying where I am always

[…]

And this place is taking

Its time from us though these

Two people or voices

Are not us nor has

The time they seem to move in

To do with what we think

Our own times are.

Graham's own time was an era of existential insecurity. This collection evokes a radical instability, expressed in the disempowerment of the poet. This finds its full expression in 'Clusters Travelling Out' (NCP 191):

When you hear from me

Again I will not know you. Whoever

Speaks to you will not be me.

I wonder what I will say.

Embedded in this poem is a reference to 'the Long Loch'. From there, Graham summons Brigit, the mythical 'Three-fold Muse,[134] at once distancing and claiming her in the persona of his 'half'-cousin. The reference to the 'Long Loch' summons another menacing presence, since Loch Long, which runs out from the Clyde, is the location of the Royal Navy's Coulport Armament Depot, the storage and loading facility for the nuclear warheads of the UK's Trident programme.

As a whole, the collection is pervaded by anxiety. This does not simply relate to the tension between Graham's chosen vocation and the home he had to leave to pursue it. The 'dark companion' sits in judgement on the value of poetry itself. Neither the moral tone, nor the question of value is, however, a straightforward review of profit and loss. The judgement is of a different order. In his *Selected Essays*, T. S. Eliot writes of Baudelaire and 'the duty, the consecrated task, of sincerity'.[135] *Malcolm Mooney's Land* demonstrates, despite Graham's word play and puns, a commitment to that duty. The collection was published in 1970, which was also the year of Paul Celan's death. I have found it impossible to ascertain whether Graham ever read Celan's poetry, but, despite their differences in style, the two share some signifant concerns, including a preoccupation with 'the duty' to force recalcitrant language to voice unwelcome truth. For Celan, this is personified in the figure of Lucille in Büchner's *Danton*, 'blind to art […] for whom language is something personal and perceptible […]' with her

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[134] *The White Goddess* p. 23.

[135] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 3rd edn. 1951), p. 426.

sudden 'Long live the King'; Lucille, who utters the 'counter-word, a word that snaps the "wire," […] an act of freedom'.[136] Lucille's performance cuts through the 'performance' staged by others on the scaffold, and the fact of her blindness to art, that she is not 'artful', chimes with Graham's contempt for 'artistic' discourse, expressed, for instance, in 'The Thermal Stair', (NCP 165), and his pervading anxiety about the relationship between the artifice of the poem and the possibility of truth. In the poems in which it surfaces most explicitly in *Malcolm Mooney's Land*, the treatment of this theme is less theoretical than it is in 'Enter A Cloud'. The concern is brought close up and personal, and it is worked out around the necessary sin which, traditionally, lies at the heart of the Christian understanding of redemption, and, characterises Graham's own relationship with the Muse.

In his essay on Baudelaire, Eliot goes on to observe that:

> In […] an age of progressive degradation, Baudelaire perceived that what really matters is Sin and Redemption. …the recognition of the reality of Sin is a New Life; and the possibility of damnation is so immense a relief […] that damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation […] because it at last gives some significance to living.'[137]

Graham's relationship with the Muse gives his life significance because of the inseparable alignment of the imagination, of which she is the

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[136] Paul Celan,, 'The Meridian: Speech on the Occasion of the Award of the Georg Büchner Prize, 1961', in 'Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan', trans. by John Felstiner (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 20010, pp .402 – 03.
[137] T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*,(3rd edn. 1951), p. 427.

personification, with the act of creation which is his own 'becoming'. In *Malcolm Mooney's Land* this relationship is depicted in increasingly catastrophic terms while simultaneously producing some of his most successful poetry.

In 'Five Visitors to Madron' (NCP 188), the Muse appears as;

> She
>
> Monster muse old bag or. Something
>
> Dreamed

who stands 'rank-breathed' at the poet's elbow, in contrast to 'The day I uttered' which takes shape to hide him in 'its bright bosom'. What is he so afraid of? He has repudiated the help of

> the growing gaze willing
>
> To give its time to me to let
>
> Itself exchange discernments

We are, I think, left watching Graham's most destructive judgement of himself:

> ridiculously
>
> Ending forced to wear a mask
>
> Of a held-up colander to peer

> Through as the even gaze began
>
> Slowly to abate never having asked
>
> Me if I had recognized an old
>
> Aspect of need there once my own.

The Muse here is a reminder of the passion which drove Graham to be a poet, of his young man's hunger for her. He cannot meet the gaze of the worn old hag she has become to him. The final stanza, with its image of a 'child running/Late for school' who 'cried and seemed/To have called my name in the morning' is not, as at first sight it seems, a reference to the Clydeside world he had abandoned for art. It is an evocation of his 'calling'; the vocation which made him different. That sound is fading and

> Leaves me here
>
> Nameless at least very without
>
> That name mine ever to be called
>
> In that way different again.

Despite the Quixotic 'mask of a held-up colander', this collection pulls no punches. 'The Lying Dear' (NCP 158), which at first reads like fairly good sex with an unfaithful lover, describes the central problem.

The ' Lying Dear', who can be taken to be the Muse, no longer cries out as the poet enters her, and the face she looks up to meet is not his. Graham is writing in the long interval between the publication of *The Nightfishing*

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(1955) and *Malcolm Mooney's Land* (1970); a period when fashions in English poetry changed significantly. The collection was a long time coming, but Graham wrote some of his most important poems early in this period; 'The Dark Dialogues' were finished in 1958 and published in 1959, 'The Beast In The Space' and 'The Constructed Space' also date from that time. This was not a fallow period and Graham's correspondence indicates that, contrary to the myths which have grown up around it, he was in lively contact with artists, writers, publishers, and other creative contacts.[138] He was certainly not out of touch with the wider world of poetry. Most notably, contemporary poetic developments, including the empiricism of the Movement poets, had knocked visions and dreams out of the arena, and one might argue that 'The Lying Dear' expresses his fear that the Muse has deserted him for them. Certainly he would have known from *The White Goddess* of her tendency to desert poets as they aged.[139] On a more practical level, Graham was concerned about the question of being 'new'. Writing to Roger Hilton in September 1968, he expressed his ambivalence:

> As usual I am worried about my fucking poetry, not wanting to jump onto the wagon of the prevailing style and yet not wanting to stick with a texture of words which is rigidly me. To be new in the right way is difficult, not to put out pseudo-experimental confections.[140]

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[138] See *Nightfisherman* throughout and particularly pp. 107 onwards. The editors also provide on pp. 151 – 152 a list of Graham's frequent companions during this period.

[139] *The White Goddess* p. 455.

[140] *Nightfisherman*, p. 218.

The poem could also be seen simply as an indication that, preoccupied with the impossibility of communication, which undermines his very *raison d'être*, Graham fears poetic impotence. But look closely: the face 'she' looks at or for is imagined – fabricated out of the cracks in the ceiling plaster. As the plaster flakes fall, the image she evokes behind her eyes is not him, but she herself is imagination and it makes him change all he's known of her. Consciously shifting his weight, he can now arouse her, but only with a hand over her eyes. It is a lie, but he persists because the lie is the price the poet must pay for intimacy with the Muse and, paradoxically, the lie is fruitful: it reveals a new order of reality, a new truth. But this is the territory of the 'lyer paradox'. She is faking it, she is 'the lying dear' and even her truth is, by definition, a fabrication. There is real regret, nonetheless, on the part of the poet for the relationship that has been lost: they mount the curves, but only 'to *almost* the high verge'. Her beauty is twisted and foreign. And they go down into only the *little* village of 'a new language'.

The 'little village' may be no place for the scope of Graham's vision, but in *Malcolm Mooney's Land* we see his world contract as he reflects on, and judges, his situation as a poet. The poetic topography moves from vast Arctic wastes to the stark confines of a prison. How far, however, should we see the catastrophe expressed in the poems in this collection as an apocalyptic judgement on the value of poetry itself, rather than simply the existential crisis of an artist who is getting older? The answer is the revelation in the title poem 'Malcolm Mooney's Land'.

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5.2 'Malcolm Mooney's Land': 'the interval of dying'[141]

In 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' Graham deploys many of the traditional elements of the apocalyptic genre in order to take the reader to another world and, in so doing, unveil the hidden nature of language and its world of literature. The devices he calls on include an epic landscape, a journey, a heroic figure (Nansen), a tragic anti-hero (Scott) whose presence in itself mplies judgement (situated at opposite poles, these two figures also evoke the global scale of apocalyptic catastrophe), a totemic mother and child, messages and gnostic communications, visitors from a different world , and symbolic beasts. For a while, we think we know this story. But transformation is essential to apocalypse; as it must be, the story is transformed. This is a twentieth-century world of rupture, not rapture.

The narrative depicts catastrophe. To understand its nature, it is helpful to focus in the first instance on the figure of the explorer. In *Notes On A Poetry Of Release*, Graham wrote of himself and his vocation as 'being that explorer who shoots the sun, carries samples of air back to civilisation, and looks his forward.[142] Despite the fact that, just over twenty years later, he is still insisting hopefully, if urgently, to Roger Hilton that '… we must find new marks and gestures to put on the visual silence which will first release us and then make an addition to other people's worlds'[143], the explorer in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' is immobilised, frozen in the 'art' world of the

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[141] *The Dark Gaze*, p. 9.
[142] *Notes*, p. 380.
[143] *Nightfisherman*, p. 218.

poem. The boundary between the explorer and the poet is porous and the text itself reveals that it is not possible to rely on the authenticity of the voice which is speaking; nor, arguably, does Graham intend us to.

Judged by, and judging himself and the 'marks' he makes, both against the figures he encounters in this icy world and against the blank page, the narrator displays a certain gallows humour. He depicts himself, nonetheless, as lost, a failure, unable to communicate, unable to make any sort of addition to anybody's world, a victim isolated by language. Typically, however, we cannot take this at face value. Graham's treatment is many-layered. It is easy enough to conclude that the catastrophe in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' is the revelation of isolation as the defining condition of the poet. Art, by definition, cuts him off from 'reality', and this is exacerbated by the practical restrictions of the page, as well as by the inadequacy of the 'marks' he makes on it.   But, as Graham also reminds us, the poet is never actually alone. The declaration at the end of 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', that 'I have made myself alone now' is addressed to his fabricated 'furry queen' but it very specifically draws attention to a poetic process, a making, artifice of which the poet intends the reader to be conscious.

Tony Lopez observes that:

> The emotional basis of the poem is a comparison between the work
> of a poet reaching into the unknown self through his struggle with

language, and that of a national hero and explorer such as Captain Scott or Fridtjof Nansen, who travels far beyond the domestic to confront nature and try the limits of the self, for what are ostensibly patriotic reasons.[144]

Arguably, to understand what is depicted in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' primarily as an exploration of the internal world of the poet is to miss an important aspect of what is going on in the poem. It is a projection, a world of surfaces and sounds, events and sensations. It is a performance, located in literary time, the 'time' of the 'diary', and inhabited by a host of literary references. Graham signposts this from the start: following the mention of 'Elizabeth' in stanza 1, we move into the world of Elizabethan drama in stanza 2, with the narrator's 'ruff' of ice crystals, and the parody of a Shakespearian prologue: 'The unblubbered monster' 'makes his play' and the poet craves the indulgence of his audience: 'Make my impediment mean no ill/And be itself a way.'

Critics have pointed out that stanza 2 brings in Joyce, with line 5, 'The new ice falls from canvas walls' making reference to the song 'I dreamt I dwelt in marble halls' from *The Bohemian Girl,* which is mentioned in the short stories 'Clay' and 'Eveline' both of which are parts of *Dubliners*. The aria is referred to again in *Finnegans Wake*. This line also rewrites Tennyson's Introductory Song' to *The Princess*: 'The splendour falls on castle walls.'[145]

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[144] Lopez p.84.
[145] 'The Splendour Falls on castle walls', Alfred, Lord Tennyson, The Princess,[III^IV], 1,*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (London:

Most important, perhaps, Rimbaud and 'Le Bateau Ivre', with its dazzled snows, monsters, moaning behemoths, glacier, smoking skies, imprisoning keel and distant voices,[146] are very present, not only in verbal allusion but in the figure of the voyager, the theme of the journey, and in the underlying fact that Rimbaud himself adopted the persona of traveller and explorer, having given up writing poetry.

'Malcolm Mooney's Land' travels, as did Rimbaud, well beyond the domestic, into the extreme landscape of language, where words provide an uncertain foothold, like the 'rafted ice' in stanza 4. Despite Lopez's contention above, the emotional basis of the poem lies not in a comparison with heroic explorers, nor in a confrontation with an inner self, but in the perilous exposure of the poet to 'literature' because, as already discussed, the foundations of that world rest precariously on language.

In her translator's introduction to *The Space of Literature*, Ann Smock sums up Maurice Blanchot's insight regarding the role of literature:

Its purpose, even its mission [..] is to interrupt the purposeful steps we are always taking towards deeper understanding and a surer grasp upon things. It wants to make us hear, and become unable to ignore, the stifled call of a language spoken by no-one, which

affords no grasp upon anything. For this distress, this utter insecurity is, Blanchot states, 'the source of all authenticity'.[147]

'Malcolm Mooney's Land' exposes precisely such 'utter insecurity'. To what extent, however, is it recognisable as the source of authenticity?

'Malcolm Mooney's Land' consists of a number of simultaneous locations: the territory of language, the space of literature, the performance stage, the Arctic wastes, and the enclosure of the page. They all have credibility within the poem. Graham's 'Arctic', for instance, is a credible place with convincing topographical characteristics. The reader can recognise it, but must simultaneously understand it as an image, principally of the page. A similar double take is demanded, too, when it comes to the page itself, since, although it is a physical reality containing the words we are reading, and thus, recognisably, a vehicle for communication, it is also, within the poem, an image, site of the death of the word, location of the impossibility of communication. The words are buried under the printed snow, and we are spectators as they struggle 'each on a fool's errand' towards disintegration. Meanwhile, the 'northern dazzle/Of silence' looks on. This image calls to mind Scott's South Polar expedition, but it also evokes black and white photographs of the death camps, with little black figures struggling towards destruction through the snow, while a silent world looks on and not a word of protest gets through. Graham returns to this theme later in the poem.

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[147] Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trs Ann Smock, p.3.

5.3 Time and Space

'Malcolm Mooney's Land' denies to the reader what Frank Kermode lays down as an essential principle regarding fictional narrative:

> although books are inescapably of the element of time, their formal
> organisation is to be apprehended as spatial.

But,

> Forms in space […] have more temporality than […] supposed,
> since we have to read them in sequence before we know they are
> there, and the relations between them.[148]

This is inescapable for the reader simply reading down the page. But, beyond that, it is not the experience of apocalyptic literature, where the truth about past, present and future is revealed through a reciprocal exchange. In the case of 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', the situation is different again: the reader experiences a sequence of words but no definitive end point because, despite his final assertion that he has *made himself* alone, the poet can neither control nor halt the endless drift of words over 'the real unabstract snow'.

Expectation is an essential characteristic of apocalyptic writing and the manipulation of expectations is a fundamental aspect of Graham's technique. On a superficial level, he plays with our expectations through the

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[148] *The Sense of an Ending*, pp. 117-18.

use of jokes, puns and word play, such as the appeal to 'landlice […] bonny friendly beasts, brother/To the grammarsow and the word-louse' in stanza 2. Here the cheery neologisms are superimposed on a distorted echo of Robert Burns's address to the mouse, a 'tim'rous beastie', at the end of which Burns's good humoured sympathy gives way to desolate expectation, of winter and of life. In 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', too, the narrator winds up that stanza in desolation, at 'the edge of earshot' with his words at the mercy of silence.

The protagonist's apparent directness of address, the use of 'I' and the invitation, implicit in the tone of the poet/narrator, to share the experience, amplifies the sense of disjunction. The diarist furnishes some personal details in a confidential tone:

> Elizabeth
> Was in my thoughts all morning and the boy

But promises:

> Wherever I speak from or in what particular
> Voice, this is always a record of me in you.

The reader is drawn into complicity by the little joke referencing the record label 'His Master's Voice', but are we the ones being addressed? Is this communication, whatever it is, not really addressed to another hero? The

'sudden momentary thunder' six lines below takes us to Eliot's thunder, speaking in *The Waste Land* [149], a reference reinforced by the 'good night' in the subsequent line: 'This is as good a night, a place as any'.

As in 'The Constructed Space', the reader is disconcerted by a [false] sense of intimacy experienced simultaneously with an acute consciousness of the very difficulties of communication which are 'Scored out in the dark' by a snow-blinded poet. This subverts, time and again, our experience of the words on the page, providing always a critical commentary, breathing a counter narrative into our ears.

> Above the bergs the foolish
>
> Voices are lighting lamps
>
> And all their sounds make
>
> This diary of a place
>
> Writing us both in.

The glancing allusion to Jesus' parable of the foolish virgins who let their lamps run out of oil while waiting for the late-running bridegroom[150] compounds the impression of futility; in stanza 5's description of poetic process from first, distant, approaches, to imprisonment in the pages of 'This diary of a place', salvation never comes, and 'the honking choir' of enthusiastic words tilts chaotic into the 'sliding' water, jeopardising the

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[149] 'Then spoke the thunder/DA': T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, ll.. 399 – 400. Eliot's notes refer to his use of Shackleton's account in 'What the Thunder Said'.
[150] Matthew XXV. 1–13.

whole enterprise. All that being said, Graham does, however, start the poem with a decisive and apparently simple temporal statement:

Today, Tuesday, I decided to move on

The lack of punctuation at the end of the line, and the fact that the decision is immediately qualified and rendered uncertain by the opening words of the following line: 'Although the wind was veering,' should alert us to the fact that this record is probably not going to be what it seems. As Simon Smith has observed[151], the page is the place of apocalypse, and Graham 'collapses this devastating news into the mundanity of the diary'. The familiar, trusted format becomes, in Jeff Nuttall's words, 'the unbearable'.[152]

Frank Kermode observes that 'At some very low level, we all share certain fictions about time.' and that 'this play of consciousness over history, this plot making, may relieve us of time's burden only by defying our sense of reality.' It demands, he says, submission to fictive patterns. [153] In 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' such fictive patterns actively subvert the concept of duration, exemplifying the impossibility not only of permanence or certainty but of a definitive record. The past is made present, often as distorted historical or literary allusion, or in traces of earlier accounts, distant voices, prints encountered in the snow; the present is experienced in

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[151] Discussion note, August 2016.
[152] *Bomb Culture*, p.105.
[153] *The Sense of an Ending*, pp. 44-57.

the particularity of physical and aesthetic experiences which are overtly fictional (they are related in a diary form already demonstrably unreliable). The future – the end of the voyage – does not come. Despite the visitors who cross the scene, Graham deviates from the traditional apocalyptic paradigm by not deploying a messenger from another world; the poem itself is the messenger and the poet becomes a creation of his own imagination, alone in his tent.

Kermode observes:

> it is by our imagery of past and present and future rather than from our confidence in the uniqueness of our crisis, that the character of our apocalypse must be known.[154]

In the *Book of Revelation*, apocalyptic writing is self-referential, directing readers to past apocalyptic narratives of suffering, heroism and rescue in order to transform their understanding of the present and future. It is a 'literary' space, not a historical one. In 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', too, we are reminded of the feats and character of a past hero, Nansen, which were recorded in his famous, very detailed, and sometimes, in its scientific record keeping, pedantic diary. Graham draws on its combination of reassuring domestic detail and the contrasting descriptions of an extremely hostile landscape to construct 'Malcolm Mooney's Land'. It is all here – the glaciers, ice-hummocks, leads, the paradoxical *Fram*, whose movement,

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[154] *The Sense of an Ending*, p.96.

like that of the poet's words, depends on being frozen rigid in the ice; the tricks of light over water. But, far from holding out promise, this narrative is transformed and distorted in significant ways. Importantly, the implicit reference to Nansen's *Fram,* which was frozen in the ice for two years, is more subtle than it appears, since the *Fram*, moving as the imprisoning ice was moved by deep and powerful submarine currents, nonetheless accomplished the journey which was its aim; in this poem, the explorer conspicuously denies himself such an outcome. His fate is that of Scott, not of Nansen.

Graham plays fast and loose with detail for his own poetic purposes; the fox, which actually stole the expedition's instruments (and ate the thermometer)[155] is transformed into a magical creature, a secret reader, who leaves his own prints on the text and may know and even call the poet's name (for the implications of this, see 'The Secret Name' NCP 237). And the crevasse into which Nansen and his team let down a telephone, using its ring to take scientific measurements of depth[156] becomes, instead of a means of information, the site of temptation and illusion: the 'explorer' hears a telephone ring within it; he does not answer it but can 'Hardly bear to pass.' Graham wrote that poetry is not a telephone, the voice of the poet receives no answer from the person on the other end [157]. But whose voice is it here? In this case, someone is calling the poet. The Nansen landscape is plundered, shaken up, wilfully inaccurate, but, more significantly, it is both

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[155] Fridtjof Nansen, *Farthest North :The Voyage and Exploration of the 'Fram' 1893 – 96 & The Fifteen Months' Sledge Expedition*, (Westminster: A. Constable & Co, 1897)Volume II, pp. 430,433.
[156] *Farthest North*, Volume 1, p.303.
[157] *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* no. 64, quoted in *Edinburgh Review* 75, p.37

a second-hand, told landscape and an imagined one. Its very precision emphasises its unreliability.

As the unreliability of the diary has already demonstrated, the principal location of 'Malcolm Mooneys Land' is not, however, narrative space. The poem occupies space more conspicuously in terms of its existence as an object on the page; black prints on white paper:

Footprint on foot

Print, word on word

This physical location has its own topographical features. These are provided by the page itself, as well as the type, the printed words we look at, their pace, movement, journey through time, and the shape and character of the lines and stanzas through which we work our passage. It embodies metrical space which can be mapped and apprehended as uneven, but significantly so; five craggy stanzas over four and a half pages in the 2005 paperback edition of the *New Collected Poems*. When the poet/narrator is in the company of others, or in addressing them (stanzas 3 and 5) the line length is short; when purporting to write in the diary – a record of thought or landscape – it is longer. The physicality of the poem makes us aware of this as a constructed space, and, simultaneously, of the purposeful destruction of a time frame. We are offered entries for Tuesday [part 1], Wednesday [part 2], and Friday [part 4], part 3 might or might not be taken for Thursday's entry, part 5 refuses a place in time altogether, and

at that point we are thrown out of 'the tent' of shared experience into the cold observation of artifice:

> Elizabeth
>
> […]
>
> I made
>
> You here beside me
>
> For a moment

5.4 The ghost world and its judgement

I have suggested above that the theme of judgement characterises the collection as a whole, as Graham looks for 'A value […] lurking somewhere'[158] in his work. In 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', the conflation of Graham's voice with that of the 'narrator' allows the judgement to bear down on his own performance, asking in stanza 4: 'Have I not been trying to use the obstacle/Of language well?'

Tony Lopez observes that:

> What happens is that the voice shifts. In Malcolm Mooney's Land it shifts very quickly from a narrative to thoughts about the status of the narrative […] We get the diary of the poem's progress as a kind of overlay to the imagined exploration diary: 'Have I not been trying

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158 'The Fifteen Devices' NCP183.

to use the obstacle/Of language well? It freezes round us all.' There is no way a simple narrative view can survive these contortions. The status of the poem is therefore provisional; it corresponds to and with the discovered diary it speaks of, so that the reader is in the same relation to the poem as the poet to his sources.[159]

It is questionable whether the overtly fictional and unreliable character of the 'diary' in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' can be seen to put the reader in the same relation to the poem as Graham's to his source; Nansen's diary is factual in the extreme. What is important, however, is Graham's exploration of the contrast between the 'speaking' of the explorer and Nansen's 'spoken' word which provides a continuous commentary on the provisional status of the poem.

Contrast, and the dialogue it generates, are essential tools when it comes to judgement. We should already have been alerted by the very title of this work to the fact that we are entering a ghost world. 'Malcolm Mooney's' is the name of a chain of Guinness pubs, now themselves the stuff of legend, a convivial world, which contrasts vividly with the inhospitality of Graham's landscape. Likewise, behind Nansen (diarist, and successful explorer of the Arctic), is a shadow hero, Scott (diarist, and unsuccessful explorer of the opposite pole, Antarctica). Scott crazes the narrative, just as behind the poem is the ghost poem which may or may not be being created in the mind

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[159] Lopez p.84.

of the reader, and whose attributes may or may not accord with the creative intention of the poet.

The ghost of Scott reverses the traditional apocalyptic paradigm, in which the reference to a past hero is projected as the vision of a promised, perfected, redeemed future, thus providing a critical commentary on the present. According to the script of 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', the shade of Scott, so conspicuously *un*saved, destabilises the heroic Nansen and dissipates hope, as well as fragmenting our perception of this story.

Elsewhere, particularly towards the end of the collection *Implements in Their Places*, Graham revisits, re-versions, his childhood. In 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', however, it is Scott's childhood which haunts us, just as much as his (shadow) diary and his ill-fated final journey. 'Old Mooney' was the nickname given to him as an inept, impractical and dreamy child, the mockery of whom made him the stubborn, flawed, inflexible man who was the cause of his own downfall[160], just as the poet/narrator, sealed from reality in his tent at the close of the poem, wilfully makes himself alone.

5.5 The 'real' apocalypse

In *Malcolm Mooney's Land*, the collection, Graham presents both catastrophe and judgement on his poetic enterprise powerfully through his

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[160] David Crane, *Scott of the Antarctic* (London and New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), p.17.

relationship with the Muse. Neither are political or social; the action works within the boundaries of art.

The title poem, however, stands out from his other work, with the exception of 'Ten Shots Of Mister Simpson', because it measures the catastrophic landscape of poetry, with all its difficulties, against a far stricter external marker. Located deep within the poem lies an evocation of twentieth-century memory which supports a contention that Graham is seriously aware of the 'real' apocalyptic events which must drive a ruthless questioning of language, its value and its power.   In stanza 5 the poet invites his muse, his 'furry queen' to:

> Come and sit. Or is
> It right to stay here
> While, outside the tent
> The bearded blinded go
> Calming their children
> Into the ovens of frost?

This conflation of images, holocaust victims, blinded war veterans, snow blinded, bearded, doomed explorers, all of them robbed of their future, all of them summoned from the past to pass, endlessly present, like the drifting words in the final sequence, before the narrator and his Muse, constitutes an emotional peak in what is essentially a poem about the catastrophe of non-

connection. Accordingly, Graham's question remains isolated, hanging unanswered.

In *The Dark Gaze: Maurice Blanchot and the Sacred*, Kevin Hart considers the displacement of the mystical and asserts that, for Blanchot:

> to write is to transform the instant into an imaginary space, to pass from a time in which death could occur to an endless interval of dying.[161]

That imaginary space is, for the Graham of 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', the location of apocalypse, an endless interval of catastrophe and judgement to which no answer but silence is possible.

Calvin Bedient, discussing Graham's pursuit of a 'soul', writes:

> Graham's "terror" of the spaces between words was the piercing point of the three-dimensional compass of his 'Arctic' poetry […] It was a fear (to introduce another term for much of what has already been said about silence) of the languageless Real, a plain but dramatic term from Lacan – an unsignifying Real […] The Real is the hidden something ('Thing,' Lacan says) that cannot be used

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[161] *The Dark Gaze*, p.9.

except to stimulate, via both fight and flight, symbolization and the imaginary. [162]

Thus, 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' presents us with an example of a purely negative revelation. The poem is a space created by layers of artifice, containing words which we know to exist only at the mercy of silence. Language itself eludes capture. The only experience which the poet can be sure of is revealed as the one which he shall never have – that of the encounter between his words and the unknowable reader, the most ghostly presence of all. Words, the means by which human beings access biography, their own reality, ultimately fail to do so. In stanza 5, the voice changes, and the narrator turns away from us, the audience, to address a figure on the stage; his 'furry queen', who is simultaneously the Muse, and 'Elizabeth'. He warns her to:

> Sit
> With me between this word
> And this, my furry queen.
> Yet not mistake this
> For the real thing.

From this point, the stage set, which has veered between the vast landscape of language and the enclosure of the word, page or line, opens out again to reveal in conclusion the drift of words which expose 'the real thing':

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[162] Bedient, *Chicago Review*, p.145.

'endless

Drifting hummock crests.

Words drifting on words.

The real unabstract snow.'

The chapter which follows, however, suggests that a more positive aspect of

apocalypse can also be found in Graham's work.

Chapter 6: Revelation and Renewal

> So here I lay you down
>
> in your word.
>
> And I shall lie down carefully beside you.
>
> You: folded like a brain inside the letters of your name.
>
> (*Peripheral Visions*: from 'Second Sight', 2)

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

Those consulted, in the course of this study, about the viability of considering Graham as an apocalyptic poet, all without exception pointed to 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' as the example which justified doing so. In traditional apocalyptic literature, however, judgement may be negative, driven by or resulting in catastrophe, but its purpose is positive. It is intended to bring about a new, and more desirable, version of reality. Catastrophe is not the whole story of apocalypse for Graham; the positive elements of revelation and renewal in his work are often overlooked.

Graham approaches these elements in two ways, both of which owe something to Modernism. The first, examined in 'The Thermal Stair' (NCP 163) is the development of the concept of 'seeing new,' in which the endlessly new experience of his work offers a certain sort of life after death

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for Peter Lanyon. The second is Graham's development of techniques of simultaneity in 'Ten Shots of Mister Simpson' (NCP 210) which enable him to make dynamic connections.

6.1 'Seeing new'

While it certainly posits judgement on the current position, the very ethos of Modernism, with its demand that, through art, we re-vision the human condition not only with fresh eyes but from standpoints which reveal hitherto hidden relationships, takes us beyond a response to description, depiction or narrative to questions of process. The reader is simultaneously made aware of the agency both of the artist and of the 'art object'. The consciousness of both transforms our vision.

In his elegy for Peter Lanyon, 'The Thermal Stair', Graham, as so often, lays down strata of meaning. On one level, he expresses a world of loss and absence by addressing Lanyon by name and by the use of close, informal, familiar language to evoke the well-worn topography of their friendship; the elements of sea, air, earth and sky which they shared, locations in the landscape they had in common, the regular markers of the lighthouses, ' the phallic boys' which 'Begin to wink their lights' at opening time. He spells them out by name, as he does the abandoned mines of Botallack, Ding Dong, and Levant, and the heights of Lanyon Quoit and Gurnard's Head, and Lanyon's home, Little Parc Owles, with its memorial foxgloves.

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On another, more innovative, level, Graham employs his debate with Lanyon about the purpose and process of artistic creation not only to remind us of Lanyon's status as an artist but to express the totality of loss: what is presented as an ongoing discussion with Lanyon emphasises the very impossibility of such continuation.

This discussion, however, offers a route into yet another level: the possibility, through the work of the poet or painter, of 'seeing new' – which necessarily implies a loss or death of what has been before, but also a certain sort of life after death.

> The poet or painter steers his life to maim
> Himself somehow for the job. His job is Love
> Imagined into words or paint to make
> An object that will stand and will not move.

The poet or painter, like the grieving Graham, maims himself in a fight against silence, the silence of his dead friend, but also that of the empty page, or the empty canvas. He is also maimed by his task, by commitment to Love, 'imagined into words or paint'. But there is much more going on here. On one level, the poet maims himself because this is Love constructed but constricted: 'An object that will stand and will not move.' Once the imagined object is objectified, it, like Lanyon in the poem, is past, dead; at the mercy of the gaze of a woman standing 'In some polite place' propounding 'artistic' – deadening – theories (stanza 11). But it is no

coincidence that the gaze is that of a woman. The destructive gaze can be seen as that of the Muse, the archetypal Other, and the maiming as the wound of separation from the Great Mother endured, according to Jung, by all men.

Ultimately, the poet's intention is the illusion of an intention. This is not simply because of conditioning questions of process, historicity and temporality, nor even because of the actual impossibility of communication with the reader (not to mention the friend he is addressing), which is a serious concern in Graham's work. Language is the poet's tool for exploring the imagination, which is the territory of the unruly Muse and therefore not under his control. Moreover, language, as noted in the discussion of 'The Stepping Stones', depends for its existence on silence, its own negation.

 Georgio Agambes contends[163] that for troubadour/Provencale poets the event of language was fundamentally amorous and poetic, but characterised by the experience of language as necessarily marked by negativity, so love is unattainable or attainable only at a distance. Nothing is something, he adds, because it is named (we are created out of nothing); it signifies nothing (itself).

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[163] Giorgio Agamben, *l linguaggio e la morte: Un seminario sul luogo della negatività* (1982) trans. by Karen E. Pinkus with Michael Hardt as *Language and Death: The Place of Negativity* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) p.68.

The impossibility of communication lies, inevitably, at the heart of Graham's 'conversation' with Lanyon; this is, after all, an elegy. Lanyon is dead. But Graham transcends this death by taking us beyond a marshalled set of specific references: the well-worn path of the tin-singers, the named lighthouses, lighting up at their specified times, the pub, the precise setting out of the dominoes – into the ghostly company of the past, of which Lanyon is now a member, and way beyond that into the elements of sea and air transformed by the two artists, Wallis and Lanyon :

> We'll take the quickest way
>
> The tin singers made.
>
> Climb here where the hand
>
> Will not grasp on air.
>
> And that dark-suited man
>
> Has set the dominoes out
>
> On the Queen's[164] table.
>
> Peter, we'll sit and drink
>
> And go in the sea's roar
>
> To Labrador with Wallis
>
> Or rise on Lanyon's stair.

Peter is away, he is dead. But what of what he made?

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[164] The Queen's Head is the pub in Botallack, regularly visited by Graham and Lanyon. Roger Hilton lived in Botallack.

> Peter, I called, and you were away, speaking
>
> Only through what you made and at your best.

Graham swerves dramatically away in the lines that follow from the possibility of hearing the speaking, as opposed to the spoken, voice of the artist:

> Look, there above Botallack, the buzzard riding
>
> The salt updraught slides off the broken air

just as Peter Lanyon had done in his glider. The speaking voice has broken off, the buzzard flies off 'to quarter a new place', and in the sequence which follows Graham uses a discussion of 'seeing new' to move towards a new experience of Lanyon's presence. He takes Lanyon's credo:

> You said once in the Engine
>
> House below Morvah
>
> That words make their world
>
> In the same way the painter's
>
> Mark surprises him
>
> Into seeing new.

And sets it in the ruin which is also his grieving self (note again the broken air):

Sit here on the sparstone

In this ruin where

Once the early beam

Engine pounded and broke

the air with industry.

The industry, the making, which took place here is gone. But:

You said 'Here is the sea

Made by alfred wallis

Or any poet or painter's

Eye it encountered.

Or is it better made

By all those vesselled men

Sometime it maintained?

We all make it again.

Graham repeats, in a letter to Roger Hilton, dated 27 September 1968, so just before the televised reading of this poem, the aesthetic he had propounded in *Notes On A Poetry of Release* in 1946:

we must [...] find new marks and gestures to put on the visual silence which will first release us and then make an addition to other people's worlds.[165]

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[165] *Nightfisherman*, p. 219.

Thus it is to this one constant, recreated in the image of Lanyon's 'painting hand' that Graham is able to appeal, 'to steady me taking the word-road home'.

6.2 Simultaneity and seeing new: 'Ten Shots Of Mister Simpson'

Writing to Elizabeth Smart in September 1977, Graham notes:

> I like Ten shots Of Mr Simpson. It creates a whole world consistent in itself and has the right mystery. This man the photographer is taking pictures of a man who gradually emerges and becomes (I hope) a creature of our concern.[166]

The poem is included in this exploration of Graham as an apocalyptic writer because its purpose is revelation, through the dynamism of simultaneous connections. It also provides a practical example of apocalyptic writing, exposing a number of elements simultaneously through a non-linear treatment of time, memory and location which is typical of the genre.

In 'Ten Shots of Mister Simpson' (NCP 210) the paradox of the poet's need for artifice deepens as we explore the – fictitious – personal history of Mister Simpson through the double artifice of the constructed poem and the – fictitious – camera lens. This technique captures the deadening power of

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[166] *Nightfisherman*, p. 331.

'art' and expresses the controlling greed of the imagination, which could be taken to epitomise the malice of the Muse. This in turn is realised in layers of tension between disaster and domesticity, involving different voices, different vantage points, and, above all, different experiences of time.

In 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', apocalypse occurs in the subversion of the private record of the diary form. In 'Ten Shots Of Mister Simpson' the process is not one of subversion but one of tension. Apocalypse is enacted in precise juxtapositions; mass extermination, for example, is paradoxically given currency by the focus of the camera lens on the immediate landscape and the details of a domestic interior. The ovens of the Holocaust are held in 'the Zennor/Bracken fires', the camp watchtower is held in the 'hovering eye' of 'the high Zennor kestrel', tragedy is a domestic affair, occurring in the tension between memory and presence caught in local, domestic settings on which is superimposed the refusal of 'art' to let memory die :

> This time I want your face trying
>
> To not remember dear other
>
> Numbers you left, who did not follow
>
> Follow follow you into this kind
>
> Of last home.

Matthew Francis argues that, in Graham's later work, 'the emphasis now falls on stasis rather than flux, and on the inadequacy of the linguistic

community rather than its transcendence.'[167] In this poem, however, while Graham's perception of the territory of language has indeed moved on from one of flux, the emphasis is not on stasis but on simultaneity. In 'Ten Shots Of Mister Simpson', the simultaneity which holds opposites in tension is achieved principally through precision. Resonant locations, internal and external, are perceived, until the locus of power shifts, through the camera's eye manipulated by the 'photographer', a creator of memory who is subjective, controlling and unreliable. What he creates is held, in its turn, in tension with Mr Simpson's 'true' memories, which we are not actually allowed to see.

In part 1, the locations include Mister Simpson's field of vision (stanza 1); the photographer's hide, inside his black cloth, referencing a judge's black hat (stanza 2) and the world as seen through the lens (stanza 2); the weather and the sea (stanza 3); the photographer's black tent, within which, and only within which, the close up face of Mr Simpson disappears and 'on the shelf of your lower lid/ A tear like a travelling rat', fleeing his fate, is revealed (stanza 4).

In part 2, Graham achieves an extraordinary fusion of images which are active in a multiplicity of directions and at many levels. We move into the interior sensibility of Mister Simpson as he responds to the external camera, and the camera's 'face' prompts recall, superimposed across and transforming the side of Zennor Hill. The camera is also the gun, the

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[167] *Where the People Are*, p.121.

prisoner's silent scream is also the scream forever frozen into silence by the camera, and we move into a timeless location in which past and present are inescapably fused, and where Mister Simpson becomes both subject and object. 'He is here' (stanza 2), but who is he and where is 'here'? And *when* is 'here?' Memory transforms the photographer, who mocks Mister Simpson 'standing sillily/for our sake and for the sake/of preservation,' into a mocking prison guard, de-humanised, making play with the word 'shot'. And we are, simultaneously, in the non-human world of the imagination, the Muse, who is without pity, either for the poet/photographer or for his subject: 'He imagines/ Still he is going to be shot.'

In part 3, we stand within the poet's eye, imprisoned by Art, as the 'reality' of Mister Simpson becomes dependent on that of the onlooker/reader/Muse. As the aching vulnerability of his 'escaped white head,' his face which 'comes dazzling through the glass', is struck and imprisoned again, it is fused with the white head of the Muse, the face which is encountered in the fourth 'Implement' in 'Implements In Their Places' as

> Whitely flattened […] against
> The black night glass like a white pig

And so the reader enters Mister Simpson's house and looks over the poet's shoulder, a witness and partner in this process of subjectifiction.

What is significant about what we find there? And, not necessarily the same thing, when the poet insists 'Somebody/ Else must try to see what I see', what is it that we should see? It is not, in fact, the details of the location, expressive though they are. It is, to pick up the theme of fusion again, the endless capture of the allusions so precisely detailed in the poet's 'photograph': the fire, in the face of which Mr Simpson must keep still – just as he cannot run from the firing of the shot or the fire of the ovens; the gramophone which transmits the voice of his masters; the wild flowers which can never, once preserved by the camera, now die, imprisoned in a jug; a ship, which can never conclude its voyage, imprisoned in a bottle; a photograph of five gassed nephews and nieces, whose fading may be achieved in 'real' life but never in this 'photograph'. The possibility of conclusion is denied us by the photographer's art.

And so we move out in the remaining stanzas, into the 'early wide morning' where landscape and language fuse, just as paint and landscape, each with their own particular independence from the painter, fuse in Peter Lanyon's work.

It might be argued that Graham wants us to recognise a parallel between landscape and language: the landscape exists within its own 'auto-geography', which we access, subjectively, by 'reading' it. This is particularly true of Zennor Hill, which is crowned by Zennor Quoit, the remains of a prehistoric site enclosing a burial chamber, and looms in its turn over a landscape punctuated by abandoned industrial sites (this

landscape includes the lonely ruins of the tin-mine engine houses listed poignantly for Peter Lanyon in 'The Thermal Stair': Botallack, Ding Dong, Levant, Morvah, St Just, Godrevy). Similarly, we exist within our biographies, which we can only access, again, subjectively, through language[168]. Language carries memory in a similar way to landscape; the ghost world, the multiplicity of narratives and experience associated with it, does not die. We superimpose new layers on memory every time we revisit it. Unlike the traditional apocalyptic narrative, however, no transformative prospect of an end to memory is on offer here.

A transformative process does take place nonetheless, but it is not a redemptive one. In Parts 7 and 8, the recording eye of the camera fuses with a series of other modes of looking. The gaze of 'The whole high moor' moves down with the movement of the camera 'to keep us safe in its gaze'. The cairn, a man-made marker,

> moves
> So slowly down to anciently
> Remember men looking at men
> As uneasily as us.

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[168] See Stanley B. Klein and others, 'A Theory of Autobiographical Memory: Necessary Components and Disorders Resulting From Their Loss,' in *Social Cognition*, Vol.22, No.5, 2004, pp.460 - 490.

Mister Simpson's past is superimposed on the past which is so present in this landscape. The prison hut, and 'God the chimney' are made present now the photographer/poet has them 'sighted'

far

Out of the blackthorn and the wired

Perimeter into this particular

No less imprisoned place. You shall

Emerge here within different time

Where I can ask you to lean easily

Against the young ash at your door

Memory is both revealed and betrayed by language. The punning image of 'the young ash', the burning bush of 'God the chimney', endlessly growing (not diminishing) at the door, also calls to mind the 'cruel' ash tree of mythology, described in *The White Goddess,* whose shade is, according to Robert Graves, harmful to crops and whose roots strangle those of other trees. [169] The image prepares us for the menace lurking nonchalantly in the lines which follow:

And with your hand touch your face

And look through into my face and into

The gentle reader's deadly face.

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[169] *The White Goddess* pp. 168-69.

In Part 8, power moves from the camera to the landscape and back to the photographer, who 'can ask' Mister Simpson 'to lean easily' against a potent symbol of horror. In Part 9, power shifts again as the poet emerges, stepping up as the commandant who controls the power to raise a 'buzzard hill/of real weather manufactured/by me'.   Against that threatening backdrop, he arranges the figure of Mister Simpson with his spade (ready to bury whom?) and even insists that Simpson himself should pretend, create, some rather clichéd childhood memories of another landscape. The shutter falls like the click of a gun, the 'shot' complete, and Mister Simpson is captured and killed by art, his being defined, it seems, by this artificial account of it.

But something else is happening simultaneously. The pretend mists Mister Simpson evokes from his childhood are 'only' his; no 'Someone Else' can see what he sees. He looks easily beyond the poet because the picture of childhood is, ultimately, his alone. Unlike the poet, he is silent. And autonomous. His power is the power of silence over words.

In 'Enter A Cloud', the next poem but one in this collection, the cloud both transforms and is transformed by its movement across the landscape.   Here, we – 'Mister Simpson', the reader, and the poet – stand still, placed in the landscape by the same transforming power of language, while 'real Zennor Hill' will move away into cloud. 'Our pictures are being taken' – taken away in an echo of that movement, as much as photographed, fixed, stopped. In a typically double-faced construction we suffer the autonomy

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of language as 'Zennor Hill,/ Language and light [all] begin to go', to withdraw from us, leaving the (fictional) protagonists to confront each other and – in a simultaneous, direct confrontation between the poet and the landscape/language – we suffer its otherness:

> Zennor Hill,
>
> Language and light begin to go
>
> To leave us looking at each other.

In this confrontation, the poet is left face to face, not with language, which will inevitably fall silent, nor with the light essential to photography, but with the hill, which, like Mount Horeb, slips away into cloud. Whichever way we read these lines, however, we, the voyeurs, the 'gentle readers', are left, as in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land', with images, an artificial record, specifically not biography. This, as much as 'Enter A Cloud', is a poem about vision, and the relationships and revelations created by 'seeing'. In 'What is Literature', Sartre sums this up:

> Each of our perceptions is accompanied by the consciousness that human reality is a 'revealer', that is, it is through human reality that 'there is' being, or, to put it differently, that man is the means by which things are manifested. It is our presence in the world which multiplies relations. It is we who set up this relationship between this tree and a bit of sky. Thanks to us, that star which has been dead for millennia, that quarter moon, and that dark river are associated in

the unity of a landscape. It is the speed of our car and our aeroplane which organises the great mass of the earth. With each of our acts, the world reveals to us a new face. But, if we know that we are directors of being, we also know that we are not its producers. If we turn away from this landscape, it will sink back into its dark permanence. At least, it will sink back; there is no one mad enough to think that it is going to be annihilated. [170]

[170] Quoted in Jean-Philippe Deranty, 'Existentialist Aesthetics', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015) ed. by Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/aesthetics-existentialist

Chapter 7: 'Implements In Their Places': the traditional apocalypse?

 'I wish

basket worn shadows on a cycle Sunday evening dust mote path

along a slow canal

I wish

you

                    ah,

                                        well'

                    (*Peripheral Visions*: 'from Bugarach', 7)

                    *   *   *

Commentators have argued that 'Implements In Their Places' (NCP 240) could be seen as the realisation of Heidegger's metaphysics, based on Heraclitus' vision of the unifying structure of the universe.[171] A reading of the text which takes account of its many references to Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* suggests that Graham's preoccupations in the poem are, in fact, less resolved. Its problems arise, however, from Graham's struggle to achieve truth, in the sense of the 'unhiddenness' of beings which Heidegger attributes

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[171] See e.g. Lopez, p.109.

to Heraclitus,[172] and it is arguable that in surfacing the violence, danger and lack of resolution inherent in poetic process, Graham performs the traditional revelatory task of apocalyptic literature.

The enigmatic title 'Implements In Their Places' raises many questions.   The *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of 'Implement' includes two notes which are relevant:

First, the Scottish Legal sense::

> Fulfilment, full performance (cf. implement v. 1).
>
> 1754 Erskine Princ. Sc. Law (1809) 334 Obligations may be dissolved by performance or implement

Second, a note on the Latin origins:

> [app. ad. L. implēmentum a filling up (f. implēre to fill; see implete) taken in the sense of 'that which serves to fill up or stock (a house, etc.)'; […] Of OF. emplement, from empler to fill, fill up, Godefroy cites only one example, in sense 'filling up, fulfilling, completing'.[173]

These definitions suggest that 'Implements' are not merely tools. Tools are passive, dependent on the user. Here, action must take place, suggesting agency and process. 'Implements' are ordained; they have to happen, and

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[172] Martin Heidegger, *The Essence of Truth*, p.11.
[173] *OED* 4.

they have effects. They might also be understood as the objects which furnish a house, a habitation, a dwelling place. Either way, they stand for 'performance'; they involve the discharge and fulfilment of an obligation.

It is possible to attribute a grand metaphysical intention to 'Implements In Their Places'. Tony Lopez describes Graham's purpose as follows:

> The poem 'Implements In Their Places' is modelled on *The Fragments of Heraclitus*; moreover it takes up and develops certain theoretical ideas embodied in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which themselves refer back to Heraclitus. Graham's purpose, in this essentially metaphysical poem, is to create a sense of language as inhabited space. The material he uses is that which is most private and personal in his life, and it is assembled to at once realise and prove the formula which Heidegger developed in his writings on Hölderlin, that 'poetically man dwells on this earth'.[174]

The following insight, which Charles H. Khan attributes to Heraclitus, is helpful in understanding the element of revelation inherent in such an understanding of Graham's aims in this poem:

> the central insight of Heraclitus [is] this identity of structure between the inner, personal world of the psyche and the larger natural order of the universe. The doctrines of fire, cosmic order,

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[174] Lopez, p. 101.

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and elemental transformations … are significant only insofar as they reveal a general truth about the unity of opposites, a truth whose primary application for human beings lies in a deeper understanding of their own experience of life and death, sleeping and waking, youth and old age …the focal point of his own philosophical reflection: a meditation on human life and human destiny in the context of biological death. In Heraclitus' view such an understanding of the human condition is inseparable from an insight into the unifying structure of the universe, the total unity within which all opposing principles – including mortality and immortality – are reconciled.[175]

The idea that 'Implements' reveals language as an inhabited space, in which opposing elements can be accommodated, is attractive and in the course of a detailed analysis of Graham's seventy-four 'Implements', Tony Lopez supports the case for reading the poem thus through the lens of Heidegger, Hölderlin and Heraclitus.[176] Lopez pinpoints, moreover, the way the various 'Implements' in the poem cross-refer to weave a dense pattern of allusion and he argues persuasively that 'Graham is deliberately creating a poetic domain in the terms of Heidegger's metaphysics.'[177] Arguably, in Graham's case, that domain might be understood as the constructed space of the poem, underpinned by the quasi-elemental quality of language. The poem on the page mimics the unifying structure sought by Heraclitus,

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[175]Charles H. Khan, *The Art and Thought of Herclitus*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 21.
[176] Lopez pp. 101 – 120.
[177] Lopez pp. 109 – 110.

purporting to allow for the co-existence of words and silence, poem and ghost poem, 'reality' and 'fiction,' making the tension between 'poetry' and authenticity bearable, and from which the metaphor of the poem can be released 'for the benefit of each individual.'[178]

To read the poem primarily in this way is, however, to ignore an altogether different, but essential element in Graham's 'metaphysical' understanding of what it is to be a poet; the very present influence in it of Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*. The presence of the Goddess, personified sometimes, but not always, as the Muse, means that the revelation at the heart of the poem is problematic and ultimately negative. Graham himself articulates a fundamental doubt about the authenticity of the enterprise and the possibility of reconciliation, or even of common ground, when addressing both 'language,' and the reader, in Implement 36:

> I movingly to you moving
>
> Move on stillness I pretend
>
> Is common ground forgetting not
>
> Our sly irreconcilabilities.
>
> (NCP 248)

It is beyond the scope of this study to look in detail at every 'Implement.' The focus of what follows is, therefore, on three aspects which emerge when the poem is read with this instability in mind. All three call into question the idea

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[178] *Notes*, p. 383.

of it as the revelation of a 'unifying structure of the universe, the total unity within which all opposing principles [...] are reconciled.'[179] The first is the recurring question of the relationship between authenticity and the 'lie' of art; the second concerns the Muse and violence, and the third concerns the opening and closing couplets.

7.1 The 'unhidden'

Right from the start, in Implement 2, Graham takes up the theme of the lie which, as already noted, emerges strongly elsewhere in his work. Deceit and 'fault' occur in the first two lines, and Graham disintegrates the hope of singing with a true voice with an implicit reference to the glade where Keats's[180] nightingale sings and where the 'fancy' of poetry cannot cheat the ever-present reality of decay:

> Who calls? Don't fool me. Is it you
>
> Or me or us in a faulty duet
>
> Singing out of a glade in a wood
>
> Which we would never really enter?

The fertile relationship between poet and imagination, perilous enough in 'The Lying Dear' (NCP 158) is reduced to masturbation (Implements 3, 4 and 5), intercut by the link between sex, death and the eternal ego of the

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[179] Khan, p. 21.

[180] See *The White Goddess* pp. 427 – 433 for Graves' take on Keats and the White Goddess.

father in Implement 7, before succumbing to lies and frustration in Implement 8, and the 'artful' one night stand in Implement 9, which places us with Prufrock ('Almost […] the fool'), moving in the 'darling's' perfumed aura. The poem is furnished throughout with references to sex and impotence; see in particular Implements 13,[181] 14, 15. The theme is taken up also in Implements 16, 18, 19, 47, 48 and, notably, 55, where Graham's childhood in Greenock is presented in nightmare terms. In *The White Goddess*, Robert Graves summarises the terror and violence Graham would have associated with the image of : 'the night and the day mares/ Galloping in the tenement top' :

> The Night Mare is one of the cruellest aspects of the White Goddess. Her nests, when one comes across them in dreams, lodged in rock-clefts or the branches of enormous hollow yews, are built of carefully chosen twigs, lined with white horse-hair and the plumage of prophetic birds and littered with the jaw-bones and entrails of poets.[182]

The experience leaves a barren, and 'absurd', legacy of disguise – 'writing big/On the mirror and putting a moustache on myself' (Implement 56) – which amplifies in Implements 51 and 57 the loss of the lyrical innocence expressed in the poem 'Loch Thom' (NCP 220). Despite its freshness, we are allowed merely to paddle our feet in the saving water of this loch. The 'Brigid of early shallows' now wears 'a knowledge', like that of Eve, and, like Eve,

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[181] For the character of this degenerate sun-god, see references to Apollo in *The White Goddess,* and particularly pages 414 and 483.
[182] *The White Goddess*, p. 26.

she is now dressed (dressed up to kill?) with art, in contrast to Graves's reminder that, it is 'the poet's inner communion with the White Goddess' which can be 'regarded as the source of truth'. Truth has been represented by poets as a naked woman: 'a woman divested of all garments or ornaments that will commit her to any particular position in time and space.'[183]

7.2 Violence and the Muse

The tone of voice in 'Implements In Their Places' remains detached, often playful, but the sense of danger is sharper than it is in 'Malcolm Mooney's Land'. In particular, Graham flirts with language throughout, 'sword-dancing in the halls of Angst' (Implement 45). His is the voice of the *jongleur*, minstrel, acrobat, exhibitor of animals[184] (Implements 37 and 38). It is worth noting that among the images working simultaneously in Implement 11, the reference to Mister Scop, while it takes us to the botanist Scopoli (see the reference to the Muse as 'listed under Flora' in Implement 41) also refers us to the 'scops' or court poets, and thence to the Old English meaning of 'scop' as a jester, or 'one who scoffs.'[185] Scoffing at language is dangerous and Graham's edgily jocular but admonitory tone, epitomised in Implement 30, does not hide the peril:

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[183] The White Goddess, p. 444.
[184] J. A. Cuddon, , *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, (London: Penguin Group, 3rd edn. 1992), p. 469: 'Besides being minstrels who sang and recited, many *jongleurs* were acrobats, jugglers, and exhibitors of animals.'
[185] Penguin Dictionary p. 849. Also see the *Beowolf* poet's reference to Heorot's 'scop' and his account of creation cited in Chris McCully, *Four Places* (Colchester: MUSCALIET , 2018), p. 19.

Language, constrictor of my soul,

What are you snivelling at? Behave

Better. Take care. It's only through me

You live. Take care. Don't make me mad.

'Five Visitors To Madron' (NCP 188), the penultimate poem in *Malcolm Mooney's Land,* leaves the poet, maddened indeed by his encounter with the Muse,

forced to wear a mask

 Of a held-up colander to peer

Through

Terrified by his own 'cheek' at desiring a visit from 'another/ More to my liking/ not so true', he is

busy hanging up

Back in their places imagination's

Clever utensils.

'Implements' sees a return appearance of the 'face/ Of white feathers' but the imagery is more savage: instead of a 'bleached/finger on the pane' and a form which stands 'rank breathed at my elbow', the 'White Goddess' appears as a face at the window which has

> Whitely flattened itself against
>
> The black night-glass like a white pig
>
> And entered and breathed beside me
>
> Her rank breath of poet's bones.

The Muse has not only become more sinister, but more primitive (according to Graves, in *The White Goddess*, the pig was abhorred in ancient Egypt, and 'its very touch was held to cause leprosy' – hence, in 'Five Visitors', 'terror spots' itch on the poet's face at the appearance of the Muse. The pig was also not only a scavenger but a corpse-eater).[186] The dance which Robert Graves saw as generating the one grand theme of poetry[187] degenerates into a febrile can-can (she comes into the room 'looking like an old/tinopener'). Finally, the ambivalent deceit encountered in 'The Lying Dear' (NCP 158) bursts into violence, progressing from Implements 62 and 63 to the cry in 64:

> I love you paralysed by me.
>
> I love you made to lie.

In contrast to the reconciliation implicit in Heraclitus's vision, the network of reference in 'Implements In Their Places' is not to an elemental unifying structure, but to the inescapable presence of the mythical Great Goddess, and it is characterised by destructiveness. In Implement 65 the Cretan girl is a

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[186] *The White Goddess*, p. 357.
[187] *The White Goddess*, p. 432.

widow in black, linked to black widow spiders (of which the females often destroy their mate) and thence, through her spool of thread, to Ariadne, wife of Dionysus, and her association in Cretan mythology with the Great Goddess[188]. Originating from 'stark' Malia and enjoined to let her mask go down on the dancing floor – the place of the ritual, seasonal dances of the poets, the servants of the Great Goddess – she represents naked truth as well as seduction. Graham, it seems, is excluded from this dance, lost, left for dead, no more than an archaeological specimen. Like Kipling (Implement 66), his 'scribbling' belongs to another age; it is pointless; a barren reckoning up of memories, including, as we move to Implement 67, a memory of the dead Peter Lanyon, who crashes to earth, to the grave, as the poet comes back to earth from a sexual encounter with the Muse, the 'underdear', the inhabitant of the underworld. Cross-referring us to 'The Thermal Stair' (NCP 163) the poet is once again maimed for his task (he has to extract his 'dead right arm').

Lanyon's painter's (and glider pilot's) vision almost chimes in Implement 68 with Heraclitus's observation that the way up and the way down are one and the same.[189] Graham does not reproduce the quotation exactly, however; his version being:

> The earth was never flat. Always
>
> The mind or earth wanderer's choice

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[188] *The White Goddess*, p. 99.
[189] Lopez p. 107 points out that Eliot prefaces 'Burnt Norton' with two quotations from Heraclitus, one being 'The way up and down is one and the same'.

Was up or down, a lonely vertical.

It seems that the model of Heraclitus must break down because the air, the unifying element, will not sustain it. In Implement 72, Graham insists

I am not here. I am not here

At two o'clock in the morning just

For fun. I am not here for something.

And then, in Implement 73, like Icarus, and like Lanyon, he must crash out of heaven before the innocent eyes of the 'meadow life'. But he is also Ariel ('Of air he knows') and Hermes, the messenger from another world. Hermes, who, in various mythologies is credited with the gift of poetic sight, and with the invention of the alphabet, was also, according to Graves, the 'official herald and mystagogue of Mount Olympus', and gatekeeper of hell. He was also said by some to be the son of, and sometimes synonymous with Pan.[190] Pan, as Faunus, was worshipped in sacred groves and has already approached, shyly, in Implement 60. Descending theatrically now, as *deus ex machina*, Hermes is apocalyptic in his arrival, in the sense that, like the cloud sailing over Zennor Hill in 'Enter A Cloud', he changes the beholder's perspective. Things start to slide towards the comic, however, in the pastoral scene below, as the gaze of the wide-eyed daisies, *lumpen* 'cups of butter' and predatory dragonflies, which are of course known as nymphs in their larval stage, shifts from self-absorption to look skyward. The god who descends to resolve what

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[190] See *The White Goddess*, pp. 99,126 159,174, 191,229, 230233, 234288, 321, 331,355 and 357 for myths and attributes of Hermes.

has become a difficult situation is 'out of what ridiculous season'; he has got it wrong. According to Graves, the true poet was the leader of the seasonal dances which fitted into an annual pattern under the dominion of the Great Goddess.[191] For all his mythic resonance, it is not to Hermes, but to her, in the person of the Muse, that the poet must look.

7.3 Belonging particles

This section examines a number of explanations for Graham's repetition of the opening and closing couplets in 'Implements In Their Places' and argues that it defines the poem as apocalyptic.

Graham declared in a letter to Elizabeth Smart, who was preparing to review the collection, that:

> The IMPLEMENTS poem is not a random collection of aphorisms
> or nutshell poems. It is one complete object.[192]

Behind that statement lies a link to Eliot, who, in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', states that

> The poet's mind is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up
> numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all

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[191] *The White Goddess*, p. 422.
[192] *Nightfisherman,* p. 332.

the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together.[193]

The word 'compound', in evoking a scientific analogy, suggests that 'impersonality' which Eliot lauds in the essay,[194] and fits well with the form and technique of the poem. Graham does achieve a variegated object, compounded of different elements. 'Implements' begins and ends with the same announcement, which could be seen as simply rounding the object off. It is, however, a qualified statement:

Somewhere our belonging particles

Believe in us. If we could only find them.

Graham clearly attached significance to these two lines, inserting them into a letter to Crombie Saunders dated 24 June 1977 (the year that this collection was published), just after an assertion that 'the act of writing poetry is my only salvation.'[195] At its simplest, the couplet could be taken to signify the start and the end (in all senses) of an autobiographical project to identify, label and integrate the disparate 'particles' of the poet's experience, with the final line indicating the impossibility of completing the exercise. That sense of incompleteness is significant in the light of the dictionary definitions of 'Implements' given at the start of this discussion which stress the association between 'implements' and completion or

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[193] T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920*)*, p. 55
[194] *The Sacred Wood*, p. 56.
[195] *Nightfisherman*, p. 327.

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fulfilment.   It is also relevant in that context to take account of the grammatical effect of 'particles': the *Oxford English Dictionary* includes the following, among many definitions, ' Particles […] are the grammatical functions that serve […] the reasoning and ordering operations of the mind.'

Alternatively, one might see the evasive particles as the elements of a lost cultural narrative and argue that the poem aims to demonstrate alienation, an irresolvable lack of coherence, the death of communal memory, the inability to rely on the shared resonance of language, the outcome of a post-modern refusal to privilege any particular truth. This, however, would be to ignore the resonance of Graham's implicit reference to Eliot's *Four Quartets,* although it is also noteworthy that while, in 'East Coker', Eliot makes linear progress between two points, starting with 'In my beginning is my end' before turning the statement round to confront us with an assertion of hope in the final line: 'In my end is my beginning', Graham both begins and ends his poem with exactly the same couplet – its end is, literally, the same as its beginning and would appear to have got no further.

Why are these particles 'ours', and not simply those of the poet? It could be argued that neither poet nor reader will find their belonging particles in the poem because of the insurmountable barrier of language between them, which means that they cannot actually 'belong' together in the experience. At the same time, however, both poet and reader are implicated in the making of the poem, which does not exist fully until they find each other.

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The injunctions in the fifth of 'Johann Joachim Quantz's Five Lessons': 'Do not intrude too much/Into the message you carry and put out' and 'Do not be sentimental or in your Art' suggest, however, that they should not be seen as personal only to Graham. This is a poem, 'made of words' and 'not to be judged by any other value put upon it by imagining how or why or by what kind of man it was made'.[196]

For Tony Lopez, as for Matthew Francis, however, Graham's key preoccupation is with questions of his own identity. While, for instance, Lopez points out that 'The prime relationship in the poem ['Implements In Their Places'] is that between the writer and his readers', he goes on to state that 'the writer continually compares this relationship with his own regard for his past'[197] and Francis makes much of Graham's exile from and need for community.[198] Bearing in mind the influence of Eliot, however, it is fair to assume that autobiography and subjective emotion are not intended to be a priority among the 'particles' from which the poem/object is constructed. Eliot writes:

> Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. [199]

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[196] *Notes,* p. 180.
[197] Lopez, p. 101.
[198] *Where The People Are*, throughout and pp. 50 and 51 in particular.
[199] *The Sacred Wood*, p. 58.

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This negative pairing is a reminder that the 'particle' metaphor is not as simple as it seems; under quantum mechanics, for every particle, there is an antiparticle, a particle with the same mass and opposite electric charge. When they meet, particle-antiparticle pairs can annihilate one another. Within the poem, the poet and the unknowable reader constitute these apocalyptic charges and it is possible to argue that Graham actually uses the particle metaphor to express the impossibility of achieving the model of reconciliation he hoped for; the repetition of the couplet takes us back full circle, to the beginning, ready to start again from the reminder in Implement 2 that this is an overtly fictional 'faulty duet'. Within a 'faulty' duet there will, obviously, be neither harmony, nor reconciliation.

All these interpretations seem to be valid. There is, however, another important link which suggests a different way of understanding the opening and closing couplets. In Implement 68, as noted, Graham uncouples the 'mind or earth wanderer's choice' from Heraclitus's dictum that the way up and the way down are one and the same. The opening and closing couplets of 'Implements In Their Places', while they too appear at first sight to refer readers back to that concept of sameness, that equality of all human experience, actually direct us, in their circular motion, to the wheel of life, death and regeneration discussed in Graves's *The White Goddess.*[200] Coming immediately after the debacle of the wingèd one's descent,'out of what ridiculous season', the final couplet reminds us of Graves' contention that, rooted in a seasonal cycle of ceremonies in honour of the Muse, 'the language

[200] *The White Goddess*, pp. 194, 255, 262, 292, 413, 416.

of poetic myth […] remains the language of true poetry.'[201] Cut off from it, our 'belonging particles' are dispersed; we will not find them.

Georgio Agamben argues that 'the end' is the poem's, any poem's, 'condition of possibility' and that the poem is therefore fundamentally apocalyptic in character. The end, however, is not only definitive of the poem, and thus a revelation: it is also catastrophic, and negative, 'as if for poetry the end implied a catastrophe and loss of identity [...] the verse is, in every case, a unit that finds its *principium individuationis* only at the end, that defines itself only at the point at which it ends.'[202]

It might be said that Graham deflects the catastrophe described by Agamben by turning 'Implements In Their Places' back on itself. But the poem is, nonetheless, defined by the point at which it ends, and, while it is 'fundamentally apocalyptic in character', it is a negative revelation because, in a conspicuous exercise of authorial power, Graham's repetition denies us closure.

7.4 Revelation and renewal?

Finally, in terms of revelation and renewal, 'Implements In Their Places' might be said to change the perception of reality. It does this, however,

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[201] *The White Goddess*, pp. 9 – 10.
[202] Giorgio Agamben, *Categorie italiane. Studi di poetica* (1996), trans. by Daniel Heller-Roazen as *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics* (1999) pp 110 – 111, 112

through the use of the negative. But 'reality', truth in the sense of the 'unhidden', is not a comfortable place for Graham. Calvin Bedient observes:

> Effectively, we are in Plato's cave; reality itself is incommunicable, out of reach; here inside there are nothing but copies.[203]

For Graham, this is, paradoxically, the ultimate apocalypse. 'The Thermal Stair' uses its creative treatment of the themes of loss and absence, to take us to a new vision of the artist's eternal 'making new'. In 'Ten Shots of Mister Simpson' the overtly artificial device of the photographer's lens is what holds multiple perceptions in tension to reveal an emotional reality. 'Implements In Their Places', however, does not sustain a positive reading. Instead, its violence, its inability to resolve the problem of inauthenticity, its cumulative articulation of the impossibility of reconciling poet and reader across the barrier of language, and its unsettling deployment of *The White Goddess* as a frame of reference, all reveal a string of different paradoxes. It is, as Graham says, an object, but one successfully compounded of failure; it speaks truth through a lie; and it reveals, through the repetition of our very failure to connect to them, a new consciousness of our 'belonging particles'.

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[203] Bedient, *Chicago Review*, p. 151.

8. Conclusion

To summarise: apocalyptic literature is traditionally concerned with the revelation, through a process of catastrophe and judgement, of an otherwise hidden alternative to the status quo which promises salvation from a critical situation. Over time the apocalyptic genre has lost both its relationship to a universal understanding of eschatology and its hopeful aspect, and has moved its action from the soul to the individual intellect in a process of privatisation.

This project set out to explore what use might be made of the genre in writing about catastrophe. It addressed this from two angles: a creative project, *Peripheral Visions*, and *A New Cave Flooded To Light*, which is a critical study of W. S. Graham.

Research indicated that apocalyptic literature was distinguished by essential narrative themes of catastrophe, judgment and renewal (or an altered perception of reality), revealed in language which makes use of a characteristic range of devices. Both elements of this project revolve around those three themes. Of apocalyptic literature's range of devices, they both explore in particular the use of a non-linear treatment of time, access to visions and dreams, adaptations of the journey of transformation, the use of myth, and the transformative force of the image.

A sense of language as a supernatural element, and of its 'dark companion', silence, also runs through both the creative and the critical elements, which share a preoccupation with the instability of language, its relationship to questions of identity, and the difficulties of communication. In both, the problem of authenticity is a fundamental theme, and *Peripheral Visions* in particular demonstrates a development of the traditional use of apocalypse, in its reluctance to privilege any one version of 'truth', or reality.

More significant, however, is their understanding of catastrophe as a literary event which takes place in the 'death' of words on the page, in the frustration of expectations, in the unreliability of memory and record, and in techniques of voice which alienate readers and isolate the 'protagonist'. Their revelation is of the fundamental insecurity which Blanchot refers to as the 'source of all authenticity', and this is closely associated with the ever present threat of silence. As this project demonstrates, moreover, many of the poems in *Peripheral Visions*, most notably 'from Bugarach' and 'Occipital Outcome', share with those in *Malcolm Mooney's Land* and with 'Implements In Their Places' a rejection of the possibility of revelation as renewal.

Nonetheless, the two elements of this project do not coincide absolutely in their conclusions on this theme. Apocalypse, in its strict meaning of 'revelation', a new way of seeing, implies the possibility of change as a way out of a critical situation. In *Peripheral Visions,* however, the struggle is against change itself, and it is demonstrably unsuccessful.

The struggle, and failure, to communicate evoked in *Peripheral Visions* is very close to the experience of the 'prisoner' in Graham's 'Clusters Travelling Out', but for Graham that is not the whole story. As this study demonstrates, in 'The Thermal Stair' he also posits a 'life after death' for the poet or artist in a continual 'making new' through the experience of their work by whoever encounters it. Moreover, he creates a simultaneity of past, present and future, notably in 'Ten Shots Of Mr Simpson', which, in breaking with a linear account of time, is not only true to the apocalyptic paradigm but achieves his original aim of creating a 'poetry of release' and of transformation.[204]

W. S. Graham would not have described himself as an apocalyptic writer. His hero was Eliot and his use of image, myth, techniques of simultaneity and understanding of poetry as a transformative process of 'making new' owe much to Modernism. This study argues that Graham's poetry also demonstrates that this is also a process of revelation which can be described as apocalyptic.

Graham's understanding of apocalypse is not static. His Muse can be seen as the 'wild goddess', with all her attributes as the incarnation of poetry, truth and life itself, but his deteriorating relationship with her as the personification of imagination is particularly relevant to the way his understanding of apocalypse moves from the positive to the negative. In its discussion of this, and of the influence of Robert Graves's *The White*

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[204] *Notes*, p. 381.

Goddess, the critical element of this project not only suggests some new perspectives on Graham's work, but contributes to the discussion of the uses of apocalypse a dimension which is not present in *Peripheral Visions.* This is summed up in John Collins' assertion that apocalypses

are works of imagination[...] Their value lies in their ability to envisage alternatives to the world of present experience[205]

In creative terms, *Peripheral Visions* accords with this definition, in that it does depend on an ability to envisage and to construct an alternative world. But the point of doing so is precisely that, for the subject of the poems, there is no escape from present experience. The Muse, however, is Graham's entrée to the world of imagination, allowing him to become 'the explorer who shoots the sun.'[206] She also empowers him to construct new worlds – positive or negative – which are the spaces in which he can live as a poet.

The Muse is, too, the focus of the most significant theme in this study. Apocalypse has lost its relationship to an over-arching understanding of eschatology: both *Peripheral Visions* and *A New Cave Flooded To Light* diverge from the traditional paradigm in that the wandering mind in the first, and the poet defined by the 'not-at-home' in the second, are denied the reward of a heavenly homecoming promised to the wandering soul in, for example, *Pearl*. Graham's poetry has not, however, lost the moral tone of

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[205] John J. Collins, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 304, paragraph 24.
[206] *Notes,* p. 380.

the genre. In its exposure of his preoccupation with the essential 'lie' of artifice at the heart of artistic 'truth', this study links this moral conundrum to the increasingly overt negativity of his relationship with the Muse, exemplified in such poems as 'The Lying Dear', and suggests that it raises serious questions about the reading by critics of 'Implements In Their Places' as an attempt at a Heraclitian reconciliation.

This project has questioned the assumption that the traditional apocalyptic narrative is obsolete, due to secularisation and to the lack of a common culture of belief in apocalypse as the promise of a better future. *Peripheral Visions* makes use of the conventions of the genre as an organising framework and this project demonstrates the potential of the apocalyptic as a genre for writing about catastrophe. At the same time, reading W. S. Graham through an apocalyptic lens exposes the darkness at the heart of his later writing.

Appendix

The eschalator

Moyra Tourlamain

The Grammar of the End

Ex

nihilo   claw away at the tabula rasa but here's

                         no where

                         else no

                         else

                         no

                         matter

                         slip-stream past

                         fast

                         faster than

                         fastest

                         past the past light

                         streamers   screaming

                     back

                         towards

                         future in the past

                         passed

                         nothing to it

ad

novissimum   walk the time

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line

                                        up

                                        walk up roll

                                        up roll up

                                        keep right on to the end

        of this

                suspended sentence

                                no

        novelties at the end

                                        of the pier: that's it folks

                                        let it go time

                                        to go

epektasy is so

                                        not

                                        the point is

                                        here we go

round the burning bush the burning bush the burning bush the burning bush the

burning bush

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The end of time: *systole/diastole*

The electric glove finger

tips

a pianola roll pricked out

by the tricking of a metronome

then

clenches

pleats it

downs all history in one

temporality

disrat

cheted

freeze

framed for the breath-

turn into chronic simultaneity

*

Ace, King Queen, Jack racing demons down

the track how far is it to babble on?

Lead us not into atemporality

a word in time saves

if you put it in flash we can't odds it

so lead blinding light but

let us dreft the sand through

our te dium

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The end of experience: *qualia*

The screaming swift. The yellow dog. The

hard life. The bitten

nails. The little child. My bird dog life

child (her hands and nails?)

seem   to me

seeming   to me

seeming   to be   me

In my lightbox see the pictures floating

are of now there we are as we were and ever shall be.

Hollows for my hand all

swung around the neck of time all

hallows stringing through reception room after withdrawing

room for living

space and then

again the garden

against the backlit yews my stage fills up

take five, take fifty, take forever no

-one quits this scene before I'm through

my parts of speech

my love

[seems to   me

seems to be   me]

My love I

 cannot

mouth the vocative,

subsist in the dative case

The end of the human body: *talkin' 'bout re-generation...*

Eros is located here just

here the human flesh definitively must

return the kiss

O

It goes like this:

it's an ordinary morning and the human person stands on the

railway platform

encapsulated impervious

to jostling shoving until whoops

she's pushed over the edge emergency!

It's not a train crash but it's touch and go

blue flashing to emergency!

Where, give us a break, give us

glow in the dark bones, casing

the joint Oh Yeah walking

wounded through the ranks

of trees stamped on the dusk

peeling at the edges

of peripheral vision.

The brain is very delicately balanced at this stage

frayed

wires snap singly

curling back in spirals on themselves maybe

one or two a second not

all at once but just enough to craze the footage

spooling past the eyelight

finding a crease in the

film

a temporary angel quits

the scene,

the   rest   is   history   –

corpses being

dead to the world

The dress code for eternal bliss

says human bodies must be worn. No naked souls.

I cannot see your face inside

your hat

The end of the human person: *vade mecum*

Alas!

Poor mind is become an astrolabe

bent by careless resurrection

men round spaces sprung apart

at the touch of an eye

so watch

out if you're strolling down those neural pathways

looking for the end

of the whorl.

Don't touch anything electrical

these lobes burn out

at the drop of a hat.

Don't lean

on the strapwork or hang

on to supporting structures

the mind tips inference down

chutes of memory or

then again

you may simply be forgotten

ladder tracks each ten

or so they go

tickety under the belt

nearer the drop

off point

the proverbial rabbit in the head

lights on moth dust.

*

Without a stick one must eventually

kick aside the pigeons and sit with nothing

to lean against.

didn't they ring for a taxi?

what is the name of this street?

have all the people closed for the night?

is this space vacant? libero? liber

a me the day we went to

the needle flickers but n n no

north it seems is

over

                              dies irae dearie

                              the lachrymosa's out along the hill

No resistance was encountered in the cloud chamber you

could put your hand right in

and then some

*

say, don't

you know it's he-re-say to render hell

impossible you can't

pre-

empt judgement vengeance

is mine and anyway

the wrath of God is all around for anyone

to see it did

for Origen tried

before and no good

came of it

The end of the sacraments: *rota dust*

light off dark on : tartan dialectic

see the orange indicator flashing?   comprennez the hazard lights?

Who thought that it would help

the situation to lattice the backbent earth

with landing lights for some messiah?

The gods who were supposed

to get the message

were blinded

by the rota dust

Ensign

Llewellyn climbs

with difficulty to

the pinnacle and

holding on to the weather cock strips

off his uniform, having extracted, from the haversack

he drops to death below,

a flag

which he waves to and fro

before wrapping it around his frame

and achieving a perfect arabesque.

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The stars are close

enough to grasp in the same hand

as the mountains.

A person down below sings out their names.

The ensign drops

a coin and shouts you

know they're only memories, died

long ago

The end of the angles*: stands to reason*

There were angels

keeping watch over saw it all

the body and the blood.

Arguably, incorporeal reason did not blink,

shed tears, bow under the weight of wings,

cry itself hoarse.

 Well.   No offence

                                 =

                                 No forgiveness.

Stands to reason.

So, mardi gras chuck fat on the fire

                    O buttocks, barrels and folly

                    O roly-poly pudding and pie

                    O pissing and bosoms and lust

reason's tweazer pricks peasants up the backside to

                    spin it sin it

                    sin, sin, sin it

                    and make God sob alive

                    with mercy and forgiveness

After word

I wish

      basket worn shadows on the cycle Sunday evening dust mote path along

      a slow canal

I wish

you

ah, well

         I shall come back with a vengeance

         tick tapping a martial cane

         tripping

         through scar tissue

         bandages flicking

         the lids of ladies

         heel toe tapping their flat-souls

         through time parcelled

         like books

         between their eyes

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