

Effie A. Lambadaridou

## PATRICK WHITE — THE MYTH OF THE VIRGIN MOTHER - GODDESS IN «DEAD ROSES»

«Dead Roses» introduces the collection of eleven short stories, *The Burnt Ones* (1964), by Patrick White, the Australian Nobel Prize winner (1973). The story mainly illustrates a Whitean metaphor and a simile: as the fire of lightning burns the earth it strikes open to light, so does the fire of passion — in the Greek meaning of the word — strike the mind open to experience, and leaves its brand of wisdom on “the bunt ones.” As in his nine novels, beginning with *The Aunt's Story* (1946) and ending with *The Twyborn Affair* (1979), White dramatises in these stories the individual's success or failure to shed the patriarchal view that the spirit should be worshipped and the body condemned.

For White is mainly concerned with the long-standing rejection by Western societies of man's Unconscious, and the feminine principle or his body, a fact that has resulted in destroying man's psychic balance, as well as his earlier relationship of oneness with nature. Therefore, man has moved away from the enduring reality in nature and in the religions of the Mother-goddess, where life is perpetuated in a cyclical motion of birth -death-rebirth. The ephemeral reality of life in a linear motion provided by the spiritualised religions, Judaism and Christianity, has reflected the individual's life in a fragmented world since the advent of the patriarchs. Nevertheless, escape is possible through conscious and painful struggle for the restoration of the individual's psychic balance between his body and spirit. Carl G. Jung called this struggle “the individuation process,” and the artist White calls it an “odyssey.” Because at the end of the long journey for psychological rebirth the whole individual becomes God the Creator or the Poet, since he has envisioned and can create enduring reality. If the individual, however, does not choose to undertake the quest for wholeness, he wastes his potential for creation, and becomes one of the dead<sup>1</sup>.

In a like manner, Anthea in the story is doomed by her patriarchal upbringing to waste her potential for creativity, as is obviously implied by her name which alludes not only to the prolific goddess of love, fertility and nature, Aphrodite Anthea, but also to the chaste, barren goddess of wisdom, Athena, by anagrammatism. White, indeed, uses his inventiveness at full stretch, in order to get meaning across through puns and symbols, like any

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1. Effie A. Lambadaridou, *Patrick White: Magna Mater and her Son-lover*, Diss. Athens 1986 (Athens: privately printed, 1986), pp. 4-35. See also Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 2 vols. (Middlesex: Pelican, 1982) I, 326.

great writer who, according to Gerhard Hauptmann's definition of poetry, "lets the primordial word resound through the common word." His inventiveness enables him in this story to point to both the myth of the mother-goddess and that of the virgin-goddess in Greek mythology merely through the protagonist's name.

The Australian contemporary setting, the action, and the characters in his works, though splendidly convincing in context, are fragmentary reflections of a psychological process of unity-fragmentation-convergence of two opposite races — the aboriginal and the Aryan invaders — two social systems — matriarchy and patriarchy — and their corresponding mythologies in ancient Greece. White actually explores the origin of the Western world in ancient Greece beneath the contemporary Australian surface of his work, to show how wholeness was achieved there. But he also points to a similar situation of two entirely different races in Australian history, the aboriginal and the Anglo-Saxon populations, to suggest what could have happened in Australia too. Being primarily concerned with the wholeness of the individual, White has observed that man's wholeness was once achieved in the Bronze Age religions of nature and fertility during matriarchy, and twice during patriarchy in Greece: first, when the unity of the opposites in man was conceived as the Homeric hero, Odysseus who combines the female and the male minds of the Greek heritage, and a second time, when it was conceived as the balance of Apollo and Dionysus.

The strong rational tendency — or the spirit — of Aryan patriarchal tribes which invaded Eastern, Near-eastern, and European countries in the second millenium B. C. succeeded in sweeping away the mystical tendency — the earth or the body — of the aboriginal populations almost in all conquered countries. On the contrary, the reason of the father-gods<sup>2</sup> helped the Greeks maintain an equilibrium, when it was matched with the vivid mystical tendency of the aboriginal worshippers of the mother-goddess. She had indelibly pervaded the Cretan, the Aegean, and the Mycenaean civilisations. And although the Aryan invasion is recorded in the myths as the seduction of local princesses by Zeus, or Pluto, or Poseidon, or Apollo, these myths really illustrate the victory of the invaders' father-god over the aboriginal mother-goddess. In Greece, however, the goddess was never quite forgotten, as is proved by the originally equal number of gods and goddesses in the Olympian pantheon. Additionally, it is certain that the two great poets of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., Homer and Hesiod,

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2. The term «father-god» is used to denote the patriarchal god by: Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, 23; by Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God*, 4 vols. (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), IV, 627; and by C. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 384.

look back with nostalgia at the matriarchal past, when Hesiod calls the rule of the mother-goddess "the Golden Age of Cronus", and Homer has his wisest hero, Odysseus, be master of the heroic male mind in the *Iliad*, but also get acquainted with the shrewd female mind of the Nymphs in the *Odyssey*<sup>3</sup>.

In a similar way, White sees the religious concept of the Magna Mater and her Son-lover in matriarchy expressing a harmonious union of the opposite forces in nature and man. He further reveals the mother/son concept to be identical with the modern term "Self" which denotes psychological wholeness, as a result of bringing together the Conscious and the Unconscious<sup>4</sup>. And he extends by analogy the "Self" to the convergence of the two Greek mythologies as the union of the father-god's "spirit" and the mother-goddess's "earth" or the masculine and feminine principles in man that express the union of the intellect and the imagination in creating great art. Unfortunately and contrary to the ideal situation, the prevalence of the father-god's rational tendency in Palestine, and the degradation of the mother-goddess's mystical tendency passed onto the Judaic religion and its daughter-religion, Christianity, which do not grant divinity to the female. As a result, when Christianity spread throughout the Western world this imbalance of reason over feeling introduced a materialist world view which has lasted for about forty centuries.

The titular rose of the story is a symbol of the mother<sup>5</sup>, as much as the crimson rose is a symbol of the blood of both the Eastern Mediterranean Great Mother Aphrodite and of her lover Adonis in the myth of his death<sup>6</sup>. Dead roses in the story signify, therefore, both the "dead" mother-goddess and the "dead" young boy-lover, who were separated and ousted from patriarchal religions, from Western societies, and from man's psyche, when the psyche's feminine side as the Unconscious or the imagination or the Functions of Intuition and Feeling began being neglected. As it should be expected, however, the masculine side of both the psyche and the religious couple, that is, the Conscious or the intellect or the Functions of Sensation and Thinking, labelled by Nietzsche "the Apollonian impulse," managed to survive in Greece, because it was appropriated by the patriarchs, in order to conflict a popular newcomer. He was the bisexual, "twice-born," wine-god Dionysus who incited the frenzy of what Nietzsche called "the Dionysian impulse." This Dionysus rose up quickly to Olympus, for he seemed to

3. J. Campbell, *The Masks of God*, III, 160-164.

4. C. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, pp. 301-303; Tom Chetwynd, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Granada, 1982), pp. 355-356.

5. C. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. by R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 81.

6. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, abridged one-volume edition (London: Macmillan Press, 1983), p. 442.



satisfy thoroughly religious feeling in various Mysteries which survived throughout the Greek antiquity. White even implies in his novels that the bisexuality of this Dionysus must have concealed during patriarchy in Greece both the condemned Great Mother and the young vegetation god in obscure dualities, such as Hera and Cretan Zeus or Zagreus/Dionysus, Artemis and Apollo, Demeter or Persephone and Pluto, Aphrodite and Adonis or Ares.

The historical substitution of the mother-goddess's cult has thereafter resulted in distorted variants of Bronze Age divinities adapted to patriarchal ethic. Thus, Great Mother Hera became a jealous, nagging wife, an intriguer and persecuting foster-mother of the effeminate wine-god, Dionysus. The love that had existed between the religious couple was replaced by strife and hatred, as vindictive Dionysus cruelly punished those who did not pay obeisance to him by maddening them, and was, in his turn, driven mad by Hera. A lot of weird characteristics of this god, scattered as they have survived in various myths, point to his dual nature. He is bisexual and twice-born, once from mother-earth Semele's womb and another time from Zeus's thigh. For the father-god's need to annihilate the goddess forced him to appropriate even the feminine function of growing a foetus in his body. After the final prevalence of the father-gods, such religious hybrids emerged, as chaste daughter-goddesses and wife-goddesses, that is, Persephone or the Kore — Demeter's daughter and Hades's wife — Ariadne — daughter of Pasiphaë and wife of Dionysus — Olympian Aphrodite born of Uranus's severed genitals and wife of Hephaestus, the Olympian virgin Athena born of Zeus's head, and the chaste huntress Artemis. Previously, they had all been orgiastic local mother-goddesses. Only the Christian mortal Virgin Mary appeared centuries later as the Mother of God, although she, too, bore the patriarchal brand by remaining both mortal and virgin.

"Dead Roses" indeed presents similar Pre-hellenic, Hellenic, and hybridic archetypal figures in Australian society — and universal society for that matter — as the authoritative mother Hera in Mrs. Scudamore identical with the subservient wife of patriarchy in Anthea. The figure of the asexual daughter-goddess Athena in Anthea looms large as the dead mother-goddess, transformed by the patriarchs into a virginal (barren), materialist, unreasonably servile, hypocritically prudent and greedy product of the male mind. These patriarchalised figures are superimposed on such psychological substructures as the actual identity of mother and daughter in Mrs. Scudamore and Anthea, the devotional and devouring love of mother/wife for son/husband in the Tullochs and the Fleggs, and the identity of father/son in Mr. Scudamore/Mortlock with Barry Flegg. After Freud White is discovering and illustrating in literature that the sexes are the personification of the primal opposites which constitute life, and latently lurk in all human

relationships. They are waiting to be discerned by those who have a clear vision after completing the "odyssey" for self-knowledge.

In contrast to man's wholeness through self-knowledge, "Dead Roses" is an appropriate title for the fragmented world of the spirit in which man has lived, since he has condemned and banished his own body. The Great Mother, Cecropian Athena, transformed by the patriarchs into the spiritualised virgin-daughter of unorthodox birth, still thrives in Western societies, and so did the Virgin Mother of the Christian Son until 1950 A.D., when She was granted immortality by Pius XII's declaration that the doctrine of her Assumption was revealed. Yet, man's rejected dark side, the loathed body heavy with carnality and the consuming fire of passion is also the font of life, the mother that gives birth to the son; it is matter that engenders spirit. Anthea is not one of the "burnt ones," as she accepts only the light of fire. Like the sunny virgin Athena, Anthea prefers the father-god's light and ignores the passion of the mother-goddess that can penetrate darkness as insight. Consequently, literally and figuratively Anthea never becomes a Mother.

Like Theodora Goodman in *The Aunt's Story*, Anthea is cast in the patriarchal characteristics of rational Olympian Athena, the product of her father's mind. In contrast to Theodora Goodman, however, who becomes in the end «the black rose» or the mystical «dark mother» of matriarchy, Anthea Scudamore remains the spiritualised «daughter,» Athena, impeded by her patriarchal upbringing to be transformed into a passionate Great Mother. Anthea is, therefore, presented in the story as the dutiful daughter who «would boil (her father) his egg before going off to one of her courses» (p.14)<sup>7</sup>. Her parents are cast in the archetypes of the pair of ancestors in a patriarchal society, Zeus and Hera; «I don't like what is nasty,» Anthea admits, suggesting Olympian Athena's rejection of her earth (p.40). On a deeper level of existence, however, Mother Scudamore and the daughter Anthea are only variants of the same Mother of God of many names<sup>8</sup>. In the story, therefore, mother and daughter are presented as «more like two sisters» (p. 13). Moreover, when Anthea arrives for the first time at the Tullochs' island retreat, she is likened by Barry Flegg to «a regular Juno» (p. 18).

Anthea's relationship with her father is one of unsolved mystery that eludes them both, because they will never admit the latent attraction of one sex to the other. In fact, the uncommunicative father has projected his Anima onto Anthea, and she has projected her Animus onto her father, according to

<sup>7</sup>7. Page references are to the Penguin reprint edition in 1977.

<sup>8</sup>8. J. Campbell, *The Masks of God*, III, 43-50.

Jung's hypothesis on the archetypal pattern of marriage;<sup>9</sup> «there goes Anthea, and again I haven't thought what to say» (p.14). Bill Scudamore is the «wry, skinny, silent man» (p. 13), whose presence is unobtrusive beside the dominant figures of the female Scudamores, but is unconsciously jealous of his friend, Mortlock, when mother and daughter are discussing the latter's proposal to Anthea, «Daddy went out at once, and they forgot they had stopped seeing him» (p. 39). Besides, Anthea's inability to create warm human relationships, «her uncommunicative nature» (p. 19), restrains her from finding out what, she feels, has in common with her father. She nourishes this hope while she stays at the parental home; and the moment she says «good-bye» to her parents, «carried off» (p. 46) by Mortlock after the wedding ceremony, «Anthea promised herself that one day she would give some thought to her father, to discover what they had in common» (p. 42). Nevertheless, Anthea is unconsciously exploring the sister-daughter-mother love for the brother-father-son in her married life with Mortlock, though she feels that she has missed this chance on hearing of her father's death (p. 58).

The life of the heroine is related in three main stages, suggested by three journeys: the first one is to the Tullochs' island, the second to Mortlock's house at Sarsaparilla — White's imaginary suburb which illustrates the seat of a patriarchal society — and the third around the world which ends in Athens, Greece. There are also two secondary journeys which interweave the myth connected with Anthea's identity. First, a solitary second visit to the Tullochs' island, «the island of her youth» (p. 62), after her widowhood; this journey alludes to the Hellenic myth of the birth of Uranus's daughter, Aphrodite, from the severed genitals of her father flung by Cronus to the sea off Skyros Island<sup>10</sup>. The journey that follows is when «Mrs. Mortlock flew east» (p. 66), actually to claim Mortlock's money and mythically to suggest Aphrodite's drifting to Paphos on Cyprus in the East, where she was worshipped as the Great Mother, Paphian Aphrodite with her lover, Adonis.

White's mode of writing suggests universality. The context of his works is restricted locally — Australian in most cases, European in less, and only once American. But there are undertones of latent archetypal figures in the characters, a device that makes his narrative an exploration of archetypal relationships behind people's everyday life. Anthea quite blindly rejects all underlying relationships, although all her journeys offer her a chance of stripping herself of the veils of patriarchal convention. Hence, she is dressed

9. T. Chetwynd, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, p. 430; Zeus and Hera illustrate Jung's hypothesis that the ordinary marriage is a fourway relationship, in which Athena is Zeus's Anima and the annihilator of Hera and Hephaistus Hera's Animus who with Hera attempts to overthrow the rival father, Zeus.

10. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, 49.



in her immaculate «white dress,» implicit of virginity and the Sun-god's light (p. 69), at the end of the story and wears a hat, symbolic of the convention she represents. In the end, Anthea disappointedly realises in Athens that she has failed to become the city's patron-goddess, the Great Mother of God, «Cecropian Athena,»<sup>11</sup> as the anagrammatism — suggestive of distortion — of the name «Anthea» into «Athena» connotes. She remains to the end the fragmented individual as the one-sided spirit. Instead, the unity-in-duality of Cecropian Athena is represented by her rival self, Cherrie as the earth and Dr. Flegg as the spirit. After discarding the «wilted rose» at the end of the story, Anthea realises that the missing half of her psyche, the earth, is symbolised by Cherrie's «stained leopard matador pants» (p. 76) that complement her immaculate white dress, implicit of Apollo's light that identifies her with Dr. Flegg. The mother-goddess, Aphrodite Anthea<sup>12</sup> or Cecropian Athena remains, therefore, to the end concealed by the hybridic virgin daughter-goddess, Olympian Athena in «Dead Roses.»

The story opens with helpful Val Tulloch's invitation to Anthea «for Christmas on the Island» to give her «a push in what her mother will consider a wrong direction» (p. 12). We should note the connotation borne by the invitation to Anthea to come from the mainland to the island for the celebration of the Christian Son's birth exactly where White will re-create the birth of Anthea as Aphrodite later on. It obviously carries the meaning of the historical substitution of the cult of a female by a male deity of love, and defines the time of the story as a later one than that of the mother-goddess's cult on the Aegean islands, where the Bronze Age divinities linger on.

Insightful Gilbert Tulloch, a «university man... an atheist» and a revolutionary «as red as they make out,» epitomised as a Cronus figure, is under the impression that «Anthea knows exactly where she is going», although he also hopes that «Barry'll do his best by her» (p. 12). The happy unconventional Tullocks, their «disorderly room so obviously a place for living» (p. 20), the «plant lives» of their guests Helen and Doug Furfield, the paradisiacal island, suggestive of deeper layers of existence (p. 30), all reflect a contrastive way of living to the conventional, meaningless, rational way of living of the Scudamores and the Mortlocks. «Doctor Barry Flegg» who «yawned like a horse» (p. 27) might suggest the coarse earth combined with the intellect of a patriarchal Apollonian Dionysus-figure by his «hairy hand... the breezer Doctor Flegg let out» in Anthea's presence, and his sunbathing in the nude. In contrast, Anthea's «principle of reservation» (p. 20) suggests suppression of feelings and sexuality by patriarchal ethic when

11. J. Campbell, *The Masks of God*, III, 43.

12. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, 326/ *Η Μεγάλη Αμερικανική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια*, 23 vols. (Athens: Emmanouel - Voyadjes, 1964), IV, 321.

she thinks about Flegg's «hard, human body, which she had been taught, it must be her duty to resist» (p. 22).

This part of Anthea's life suggests her advent to the land of Athena's previous existence in the collective unconscious with the hope that she might recapture time lost by memory. The land the invitation alludes to would, then, be Elysium, ruled by Cronus, a happy land of perpetual day that reflected the blissful time of the reign of Cronus and Rhea on earth before the coming of the patriarchs. Elysium was situated close to the Pool of Memory, and its inhabitants had the prerogative of rebirth<sup>13</sup>. All Anthea has to do, it seems, is «to remember» her previous existence in the collective unconscious. Even the psychopomp and former fertility god, Hermes, might be present in the «red, skinny, indigenous... mail-man», Ossie Ryan, who meets Anthea's plane and drives her to the Tullochs' (pp. 15-17a nd 23).

Consequently, the mother-goddess Aphrodite/Hera behind the patriarchalised daughter-goddess, Athena, or Ariadne, or Aphrodite, is challenged to walk into the paradisiacal world of Cronus and Rhea in matriarchy, and to remember her son-lover, Dionysus, Zagreus, or Adonis in the person of Doctor Flegg. But Anthea carries with her the uncompromising intellect in «the blue,» a symbol of the sky-god Zeus, which Mother Scudamore/Hera has advised her to take, «Anthea dear — put in your blue» (p. 13), and hangs the outfit on the cheap plastic hanger as an emblem (p. 19). She feels that:

... after all it was not what went on at other people's houses which invested those houses with peculiar life. It was what she herself brought into them (p. 19).

Only part of Anthea's previous existence of the mother-goddess is dug out, though her behaviour changes on the island, as «she was becoming a Different Person» (p. 25). Anthea drinks gin, abandons herself to the senses, and pursues Flegg's company. However, the patriarchal grip on her nature strongly interferes in Mummy's regular telephone calls every evening (pp. 23, 25), although the wise maiden's «will slackened in the slack air, the conscious grew unconscious» (p. 25).

Correctly, therefore, Timothy G. A. Nelson observes that «Flegg offers the part of Ariadne»<sup>14</sup> to Anthea in the scene of his attempt to seduce her on the beach<sup>15</sup>. However, Nelson connects «Flegg/Bacchus» and Ariadne in their

13. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, 121, 123.

14. Timothy G. A. Nelson, «Proserpina and Pluto, Ariadne and Bacchus: Myth in Patrick White's 'Dead Roses',» *Australian Literary Studies*, X, 1 (May, 1981), 112.

15. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, 99; Graves explains that Athena had been the Triple Moon-goddess, like Artemis, Hera, Aphrodite, Pasiphaë, and Ariadne. When the central person, the Goddess as Nymph was suppressed, myths related to her were transferred to Aphrodite; *Ibid.*, 297; Graves asserts that according to Pausanias, «Pasiphaë is a title of the Moon, and



relationship of lovers who became husband/wife in the patriarchal version of the myth. My opinion is that White's allusion to the myth of Ariadne and Dionysus aims at illustrating the failure of the patriarchalised figures in Anthea and Flegg to recover their identity as the Cretan Great Mother, Hera/Pasiphaë/Ariadne and her son-lover, Zeus/Zagreus/Dionysus in matriarchal Crete<sup>16</sup>. Since White most definitely differentiates the child-god Dionysus of matriarchy from the adult Dionysus of patriarchy in his novels, I believe that the adult, intellectual Doctor Flegg hints at Apollonian Dionysus, Athena's brother, who must share the blame with Anthea for not recovering their unity-in-duality. White's purpose of establishing the identification of mother/daughter prior to Anthea's visit to the Tullochs' island, is to hint at the relationship of mother/son between Anthea and Flegg, not at that of husband/wife. The main characteristic of the son-god in matriarchy is his love and sacrifice for the mother, whereas, Flegg displays the patriarchal characteristic of Dionysus when he expresses his idea to Anthea that man is animal «with instincts of decency thrown in» (p. 29). Anthea, therefore, is not helped by her mythical partner and, as a result, rejects his passes on the beach (pp. 24-39). Moreover, she displays Athena's prudence:

She was rather pleased with the prudence which had enabled her to handle the most difficult situation of her life (p. 29).

Athena's prudence expresses through the action Athena's refusal to play out of wedlock the central aspect of pre-Hellenic Triple Moon-goddess, that of the Nymph (nubile woman). She is thus conforming with patriarchal ethic, as well as with the image of Olympian Athena who was presented in the aspects of the virgin maiden and the wise crone<sup>17</sup>. The missing aspect of the nymph in Anthea is taken on by Cherrie, Flegg's sensual wife and mother of his four children. I agree with Nelson's association of Dionysus with leopard, though for a different reason: Dionysus had epiphanies as lion and panther, and Zagreus, as tiger<sup>18</sup>. This attribute of the god reflects the feminine element of the mother-goddess in him, as much as the lions that accompanied the Great Mother of Gods, Cybele, suggested the masculine

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«Itone,» her other name and a title of Athena as rainmaker; *Ibid.*, 306; Pasiphaë's daughters, Ariadne and Phaedra, are reproductions of herself.

16. *Ibid.*, 108; Graves asserts there was a Cretan cult of Dionysus-Zagreus. *Ibid.*, 110; Dionysus had been confused with Cretan Zagreus who had been similarly torn to pieces. *Ibid.*, 109 and 347; Dionysus married Ariadne on Naxos, and later set Ariadne's bridal chaplet among the stars as the Corona Borealis. The chaplet was in the form of a rose-wreath, and made by Hephaistus. See also *The New Caxton Encyclopedia*, 19 vols. (London: International Learning System Corporation, 1979), II, 510.

17. *The Greek Myths*, I, 14, 99.

18. Timothy Nelson, «Proserpina and Pluto», p. 112; R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, 109, 118.

element of her son-lover in patriarchy. Therefore, the alleged effeminacy of patriarchal Dionysus as well as the androgynous nature of patriarchalised Hera symbolise the integration of the son's white light as the Conscious, smeared by black dots of the dark mother's Unconscious on the leopard-skin pants of Flegg's wife. By the symbol of her pants-cloth, moreover, Cherrie Flegg suggests the matriarchal nymph as the feminine, feline beast of prey, the mother whose love devours the son for his and her own regeneration.

On a psychological level Anthea does not recognise her young Animus in Flegg, as the father-complex is still too powerful in her psyche. This is evident in a dream she has about her father, as well as in the linguistic mode of the passage on waking from a nap after the incident with Flegg on the beach:

She dreamed about her father, who was smoother than fact... In any case she woke up smiling from a dream too garbled to remember... and rose to comb the knots of her painful hair (p.29).

That same evening Anthea announces to her mother over the telephone that she is leaving the following morning,

...for almost the first time since coming to the Island, perhaps even in her whole life, saw clearly what she must do (p. 31).

In stepping out of the Tullochs' world, Anthea knows that she will meet Dad's friend on coming home, the elderly Mr. Mortlock — twice misheard as «Mortlake» on the wire (p. 31). This is apparently also what Mother Scudamore has been after, «as though her voice outlived its purpose Mrs. Scudamore died away» (p. 31).

A new, double-faceted relationship, that of mother-earth Demeter with the Core/Persephone, begins between Anthea and her mother after the appearance of the rich, elderly suitor, Mortlock/Mortlake. The pre-Hellenic reality of mother-earth Demeter who is also the Queen of the Underworld, Persephone or Hecate, underlies the patriarchal myth of mother Demeter and daughter Persephone. In the unconscious realm, Anthea explores her relationship with her father when she accepts Mortlock's proposal by projecting her father-animus on Dad's friend, and identifies with her mother. The misheard name «Mortlake» (the lake of the dead) is not accidental. It is peculiarly reminiscent of Zeus's brother, Hades, King of the dead, styled Pluto «the Rich One». In the Hellenic myth, Hades's dominions situated near Elysium contained his palace with the Pool of Lethe (the Lake of Forgetfulness) on its left<sup>19</sup>. The name «Pluto», however, refers also to the boy vegetation god, the son of Demeter/Persephone in the Eleusinian

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19. *Ibid.*, 121.

Mysteries who meant lushness and ecstasy<sup>20</sup>. The realm of the dead, or the realm of Persephone and pre-Hellenic mother Hecate stood for the pre-Hellenic hope of regeneration. But the realm of Hades was a Hellenic concept for the ineluctability of death<sup>21</sup>. Anthea is, therefore, tricked by Mortlock/Pluto's double identity, as she escapes from the son to marry the father. During her married life she lives in the realm of the dead, the 'Underworld, without discovering the mother's passion, hence without hope of regeneration.

Mortlock is «the central character in a myth of death,» Nelson claims, as much as «Flegg, whom Anthea rejects, is Bacchus, the protagonist in a myth of life<sup>22</sup>.» I may say that Mortlock as stern Hades is the gloomy aspect of death as the end of the light of life, while Flegg as Pluto/Dionysus conceals the father/son of matriarchy who is the protagonist in a myth of life-death-rebirth. Behind the double identity of Pluto/Hades and Pluto/Dionysus lies the appropriation of the son's name by the father-god. Anthea sinks to death by her marriage to Mortlock in the unconscious realm, and emerges from it unaware of her own identity as the mother-goddess; this is why «she re-visited the island of her youth.» For a second time she is met at the airport of the island by the «mail-man,» Ossie Ryan, who «smiled and said: "You remembered then!"» (p. 65).

She walks into the Tullochs' «in her hat and gloves» (p. 65) still carrying the heavy convention of her upbringing. But in the deserted island she soon adopts man's old way of living in nature:

She clumped like an animal through the scrub. Or stalked birdlike over the sand. So deserted was her desert beach that she took off all her clothes once, without even looking over her shoulder, and walked into the milky sea. Exquisite skirts of foam clung to her ankles, and began to soothe her thighs. It was so gently perfect in the healing water that she closed her eyes and almost understood which direction was the right one (p. 65).

The mother-goddess Aphrodite («foam-born») might be taking her ritual bath in the sea to renew her virginity after killing the father/son-lover, Mortlock, in a scene that simulates the birth of the goddess of love from the unconscious sea. However, untouched by the fire of passion, Anthea has been described as the Core in a mock-descent into the Underworld, and she

20. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 24 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964), XVIII, 92; J. Campbell, *The Masks of God*, III, 14; Campbell writes, «Pluto, on the one plane of reference personifies the wealth of the earth, but in a broader sense is a counterpart of the god of mysteries, Dionysus».

21. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, 123.

22. Timothy Nelson, «Proserpina and Pluto», p. 112.



can find neither rebirth nor love on her return from the unsuccessful journey: she "almost understood" that the right direction was to "fly east" as Aphrodite did<sup>23</sup>, but when she does, it is Mortlock's "*Money!*" (p. 66) she is after.

White has ingeniously used the myth of Persephone's husband Pluto in the patriarchal concept of Hades, against that of her son Pluto in the matriarchal concept of the vegetation god, to prove that the psychological transformation of the father-animus into the young Animus did not take place in the contemporary three-corner relationship. For in the mythology of pre-Hellenic peasantry the male spirit functions both as father and son. That means that the energy of the sun fertilises the earth, or the mother's womb, and makes the seed spring up as vegetation which is the bisexual offspring. In all probability this drama in nature was enacted in the Eleusinian Mysteries in which Pluto, the child vegetation-god, must have played his part as Demeter/Persephone's son-lover.

Before Mortlock's proposal a hint is dropped by the peasant charwoman, Mrs. Meadling, at the wrong projection of Anthea's Animus onto Mortlock. In the scene of Anthea's joy over the largest bunch of crimson roses" (p. 38), offered to her by Mortlock, Mrs. Meadling identifies Anthea with all the fertility goddesses when she addresses her as «the Queen of Flowers» (p. 38); but she also gives her a warning that Mortlock is not to be connected with lushness by his offer: «there's a glut of 'em this year. They can't *give*' em away down at the stalls" (p. 38). The reader can feel Anthea's struggle for finding her identity, symbolised by the "crimson roses," when he is told, "she could not resist one more effort to achieve the perfect cumulus of crimson" (p. 38).

Crimson, or garnet is the colour called after the mythical tree of the realm of the dead, the *granatum* or pomegranate. It sprang from the child Dionysus's blood on the earth when he was torn to pieces by the Titans<sup>24</sup>. In the Hellenic myth the pomegranate was the food of the dead which Persephone was tricked into tasting by Hades's gardener, Ascalaphus, before what was to be her permanent departure from that realm; but tasting the pomegranate ensured her bondage to the realm of the dead and her return to it, as «entry into the mother» in psychology means regeneration by establishing a relationship between the Ego and the Unconscious<sup>25</sup>. However, patriarchalised Anthea descends into the father-god's, not the mother-goddess's realm of the dead and, therefore, does not unite the opposites. This dead realm is symbolised by the petrified, inanimate «blood-stone ring,» worn by Mortlock to express the concept of death which

23. R. Graves, *The Greek Myths*, I, 49-50, 71.

24. *Ibid.*, 103-104.

25. *Ibid.*, 91, 93, 95, 96; C. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, p. 301.

is not followed by regeneration. While the symbol of the realm of pre-Hellenic Persephone is very much alive in the person of Flegg's wife by her name "Cherrie," which is another symbol of the blood shed by the son's sacrificial return to the womb of mother earth<sup>26</sup>. Anthea's effort to achieve "the perfect cumulus of crimson," then, suggests her will to descend to the Underworld to find her identity, as well as her deception by Mortlock. We are told the moment she is leaving her parental house with Mortlock that "there was too much else to explore" (p. 42).

The action and the linguistic mode in the second part of Anthea's life signal Hades's dominions, wherein death, privation, the delusion of shadows, meanness, and darkness prevail. Mortlock's engaging in the exhaustive task of "wheeling manure up the hill, in a barrow", in which Anthea joins him, expresses the writer's sarcastic look at patriarchal ethic toward its painful effort to spiritually elevate the human condition to divine heights, instead of climbing them up through mere acceptance of its flaws (pp. 56-57). The Mortlocks after their marriage first fly "east," then travel by car at "late hour" (p. 42), and arrive at Mortlock's house which "was at least a solid, if dark reality" (p. 42). In his own environment of the Unconscious, regardless of delusions, Mortlock quickly drops the mask worn in society. His "urbanity," displayed at the wedding reception when "he cocked his leg at several ladies" (p. 41), vanishes with his clothes, as he looks "less impressive in his underclothes" (p. 44), which are a symbol of underlying reality.

The impression of lushness, previously given in his offer of the largest bunch of crimson roses, proves to be a delusion when he explains his neglected garden as a step of economising. The "economical butter" and the "trick of... special-offer mutton", preached to Anthea on setting foot at the "deserted house" is further evidence of an exceedingly mean and deceitful person. Hypocrisy, too, is revealed in Mortlock, the alleged womaniser, when their wedding night is spent by simply lying "beside each other in the Beard Watson bed" (p. 45). The roses, above all, that earlier gave Anthea so much joy, inside "her husband's house... looming awfully in the darkness" suggest the degradation of the mother-goddess by being "the neglected roses, in some cases almost turned to metal, to bronze" (p. 43). Nevertheless, neither the "entombed roses falling," nor the redundant, suffocating furniture chosen by Mortlock's ex-wife, dishearten Anthea who is determined to "like it here": we are simply told that "the bride loved her house, her husband." Blind Anthea unpacks again the emblematic "pale-blue nylon" (p. 44), and begins with relief her married life in chastity by going

26. D. H. Lawrence, "Why the Novel Matters," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 2 vols. 4th ed. (New York: Norton & Co., 1979), II, 2223. Lawrence compares the body of man to a "vessel of clay... (which, if cut) will bleed, like a can of cherries".

back in memory to Flegg and crying "very briefly... for happiness." Enveloped in a world of delusions,

... she shuddered deeper into the unaired sheets, into an unexpected roughness, and recalled how she had escaped, by that same grace of reason, the brutality of sand (p. 45).

Nevertheless, the Scudamores and the Mortlocks undergo a transformation process in Anthea's psyche, while she is wandering in the Unconscious during her married life. This process illustrates her distorted psychological growth into maturity, by which, the parental images keep fading away to the point where Anthea becomes mother of her mother, and takes her husband for her father, when she calls him "Daddy." Mortlock's death signifies his elimination from Anthea's, life. Very early Anthea discovers with a shock that "her mother was not always right" (p. 47). Five years later, she begins "to feel guiltily irritated at being treated like a child" by her mother (p. 52). By the time Mrs. Scudamore leaves Sarsaparilla, she has become Anthea's "friend, who only incidentally, happened to be her mother" (p. 52). At this point of their relationship mother and daughter are identified. Finally, after her widowhood Anthea becomes the mother, and her mother the child, "Mrs. Scudamore... was glad to surrender her authority... she secretly admired the motherliness of her child" (p. 62).

On the other hand Mortlock, "the substantial man" (p. 47) who had been "a success in business" (p. 40), the man who "was all kindness, all attention... and *rather fun*" (p. 41) before his marriage, becomes "the old boy" (p. 48) by the time he is "semi-retired" (p. 45). Hessel Mortlock, as the mythical Hades, often takes on characteristics of his brother, Zeus, in the role of Anthea's father/husband. Therefore, the reader is told that he was thought "the kind of man who couldn't resist making a fool of himself" by elderly ladies (p. 49) when they invite him, the lean figure of an old man "in his dark, best suit" (p. 49) with his "amiable... young... so large" wife (p. 49). Five years later, Mortlock is seen by Anthea as "less even than a boy" (p. 49); and finally as "an old resentful baby, puzzled by some logic of the world" (p. 50) when he insists that his mother-in-law ought to "close the lid of the lavatory bowl" (p. 50), while she refuses to conform. The father-animus is identified with Mortlock in Anthea's psyche at this point. This explains Anthea's "slip of the tongue" (p. 52) when she calls him "Daddy" (p. 51). She feels "pity for this old man" (p. 54) before deciding to flee from "that house of defection" and Mortlock (p. 60).

During the span of their married life, the Mortlocks had been "early-to-bed, of course, and sometimes then, they would hold each other most touchingly" (p. 47). Anthea's sexless relationship with her husband explains Athena's nature of the prevalent spirit over her earth, as "she *ordered* her



life," and that "was the way of happiness" (p. 56). This relationship also hints at what Anthea/Athena has in common with father Zeus, as she does not succeed in exorcising the father-image from her psyche by replacing it with Flegg. Once however, she has a vision of her neglected earth in the Fleggs:

Once Mrs. Mortlock, from behind her Gothic hands, was horrified to receive a vision of the bodies of Barry Flegg and Cherrie Smith lashed together by ropes of hair. Lashed and lashing. She was horrified with herself, she felt faint (p. 48).

Quite obviously, Anthea emerges from the Unconscious again as the daughter even after the "death" of her husband, Mortlock. Therefore, she does not gain wisdom. Dramatic irony is used, as the reader is given the evaluation of Anthea's struggle for finding her identity through Val Tulloch's point of view at all the important moments of Anthea's life. So Val sent Anthea the invitation to the island at the opening of the story, because she thought that Anthea "is just a bit brought-up and not brought-out" (p. 12). During Anthea's stay at the island the thought, "I must do something for Anthea" (p. 18), persists on Val. Obviously disappointed at Anthea's resistance to change, Val drives her to the airport, and she "was determined to say something to the girl, something sympathetic and helpful. Yet she could not find the moment or the word" (p. 31). At the wedding ceremony Val's comment was: "I hope she does (know where she is going), poor girl... otherwise, I shall have to feel sorry for her" (p. 41). After Anthea's separation from Mortlock, Val gives her the key to their house on the island, "to work some of it off on the Island". Val abandons her role of a helpful figure after this last gesture, and pities Anthea and Mrs. Scudamore, "I don't believe either knows what she wants" (p. 62).

On return from the Island, unredeemable, "dead" Anthea very quickly finishes "the refresher course at the School" (p. 62) when she allegedly has a brushing up of her patriarchal upbringing. Subsequently to her return from the Island, Mrs. Mortlock "flew east," and though this journey alludes to Aphrodite's drifting to Paphos in the Eastern Mediterranean, a methodical, materialist Anthea remains at Sarsaparilla for months to fight her sister-in-law, and win Mortlock's "money" (p. 66) which, at last, offers her the illusory lushness she had expected from Mortlock in life.

Cut off from her Unconscious, Anthea Mortlock keeps on journeying after her return from Sarsaparilla when she decides "to travel... everywhere... Provided I travel" (p. 67). Her voyages "were not recorded," except for the fact that she enjoys the abandoned husband's money by staying "in many, and the best, hotels," and shopping at the most exclusive shops. She often buys expensive objects for which she has no need. None of the journeys, however, becomes a journey for the quest of self-knowledge:

Incidentally, she crossed oceans, climbed mountains, was carried down great rivers, and considered remaining for ever on a Greek island, only the haphazard plumbing put her off (p. 67).

Blind to the flow of transformation in life, Anthea prudently keeps the Great Mother hidden behind the chaste Maiden, and does not venture to experience passion; she rejects all "proposals of marriage, and even more indecent propositions" (p. 67). The key to Anthea's identity as Athena comes through her intention "to return to her native city" while she is in Athens.

Then, in Athens, she suddenly grew bored, and it occurred to her to return to her native city, to bask in the glory of achievement (p. 67).

During a solitary bus-ride and a walk to the coast of Athens "that last afternoon," Anthea receives the revelation of her identity and that of the Fleggs in a chance reunion with them. White's linguistic mode provides many differences between Anthea, the Maiden-goddess, and the pre-Hellenic androgynous Mother-goddess, represented by the Fleggs. In the scene when Anthea meets the Fleggs at the coast of the Saronic (p. 68) she is "a substantial figure" or a petrified "statue in motion" (p. 67). The virgin-goddess, superimposed on the Great Mother, Cybele, whose son-lover united with her by hanging himself on a pine-tree, "frowned slightly to find that some of the... dirty, sticky stuff of the pines oozed out onto her fingers," thus leaving the stain of incest on Anthea which "would refuse to go off" (p. 68). The sophisticated, immaculate virgin-goddess is suggested in the image of Anthea wearing "her white, rather heavy dress" (p. 67), shoes with high heels (p. 69), a hat and lipstick (p. 72) on a walk to the coast.

The patron-goddess of Athens is "enthroned" (p. 72) on a camp stool by the Fleggs, "all of them looking up to her, and she began to accept it as her due" (p. 71). She prefers the hygienic "authentic Australian cuppa tea," instead of intoxicating ouzo (p. 71). Sold by an "old Greek" to Doctor Flegg, and tossed "into his wife's leopard-skin lap" (p. 73), the bunch of "crimson-purple roses" is a symbol of the Great Mother's passion for her son-lover and his own *πάθος* (passion) for the mother, that the Fleggs deserve. Incidentally, the name Cherrie (cherry) is a very successful metonymy for the colour of blood, as blood is the main characteristic of a live body that symbolises the Mother. Anthea realises that she deserves only Mortlock/Hades's "dead roses" when she refuses to accept the bunch. She "begs for only one rose," as she explains that "flowers die on (her) very quickly" (p. 73). Thus, the revelation comes to Anthea that she can never be the mother-goddess and Queen of Flowers, as she is only the inexperienced daughter, the Core.

The Flegg children, on the other hand, realise with terror that Anthea is "a peculiar woman, vague in thought... strayed out of some other category, of

divinities and statues" (p. 69). In contrast to overdressed, massive Anthea, the Flegg children walk barefoot (p. 69), are leggy and mix "sea with some of the dust, to make mud" (p. 68). The body of Doctor Flegg's youth is "hardened, scored and already grizzled by participation" (p. 69). In contrast to the father-god/Mortlock's impressive Riley, suggestive of the sumptuous Aryan sun-chariot, the humble pre-Hellenic couple of the opposites, suggested by the Fleggs, drive a humble "minibus in which the Fleggs must have quarrelled across Europe" (p. 70). The stains, denoting the blood and passion of her body, and reflected on her pair of "stained leopard-skin matador pants" (pp. 71-76) do not make Cherrie ashamed. The Fleggs drink intoxicating alcohol, "that ouzo stuff... left over from last night's drunk" (p. 71). Cherrie has humility when she mentions that she is not "cut out for any sort of academic wife" (p. 72). After the moment of recognition, the mother-goddess in Anthea feels "she even had power over this unknowing man" (p. 69), Flegg.

By the end of the encounter with the Fleggs, Anthea has had the revelation that Flegg is the spirit of the son identified with Apollo, the brother of the virgin/mother-goddess, Artemis/Athena, while Cherrie is his earth, the Great Mother. The solitary rose which Anthea is offered incites her, in this last dropping of masks, to challenge Barry Flegg to sharing the blame for not uniting with her. She tries to convey to him her birth as Aphrodite: "did she, perhaps, hope he might watch her rising from the sea?" (p. 73). Thus, Apollonian Dionysus in Doctor Flegg is exposed by Anthea, and her silent accusation is accepted by an explosion of Flegg's conscience:

But he was looking down, his eyelids weighed with heavy copper. Frowning. His eyes saw inward, she realised, preoccupied no doubt with some more important matter, of an explosive conscience (pp. 73-74).

Therefore, Anthea "went away, leaving him to clothe a secret part of him which she knew by heart" (p. 74), because it was her own plight with Mortlock. The Dionysus part of Doctor Flegg/Apollo springs up in Anthea's way as a fantasy of "the young... sinewy Greek", a lewd, Dionysian figure who chases her, insinuating that he wants to seduce her (p. 74). The figure is suggested to have sprung up from her own Dionysian side too; the idea is evident in the following quotation that comes after leaving Doctor Flegg:

Once or twice Mrs Mortlock turned to confirm that no one was aware of the thoughts she was indulging in so recklessly, and found the landscape empty of all but its serene perfection. Into which her mind, putting on distorted flesh, lumbered and lurched, the lips of thought parted to receive. In her silence she gave little gasps, or grunts, of anticipation or surrender. Once she even laughed aloud (p. 74).



It is the first and last time in the story unfulfilled Anthea laughs. Her laughter suggests her contamination by contact with the nature of Dionysus. For the primary element in the Dionysian festival, the joy of life, was expressed by the god's symbology, wine and the phallus in orgiastic practices of the Dionysian frenzy<sup>27</sup>. The mind of spiritualised Athena puts on «distorted flesh» at this point for the moment of her own revelation. The mother-goddess briefly flickers in her psyche, as her clothes, or the layers imposed on the Great Goddess, are torn, or lost, or disarrayed. During her terrified flight she realises that «she had left off her foundation garment,» and her loose breasts, implicit of the mother-goddess's fertility «were dealt out in great dollops». Her immaculate dress becomes «her splitting dress» (p. 74). She loses her hat (p. 75), yet she remains to the end the virgin-goddess/Athena. She might be taking her bath for renewing her virginity when «she bathed» back at the hotel. She might be anew discarding her flesh when she drops into the waste-basket «the wilted rose she had accepted from those people against the warning of her better judgement» (p. 75). In running away from reality, prudent Anthea/Athena finds consolation in her earthly possessions for the flesh she has never enjoyed. She hides «the air ticket and her traveller's cheques» under her pillow for safety (p. 75).

Alone in her hotel room just before the end of the story, Anthea discovers her identity through a dream: «the clocks of Athens were standing still» (p. 75), while its patron-goddess, the Maiden Athena, is dreaming of «Cherrie Flegg, of her stained leopard-skin matador pants» (p. 76), and discovers that she, the virgin-goddess, is the Mother of God in Cherrie. The consciousness reached by Anthea with slow distaste on waking from the darkness of ignorance «at some point in that incalculable night», is that «she awoke to her own face» (p. 76). This is the face of the mother-goddess in every woman, or the feminine principle in life, hidden in the Unconscious «mutilated unmercifully» (p. 76) by the patriarchs. The «reflected and reflective» face which Anthea looks at in her glass is that of the orgiastic mother-goddess, Athena, the loving bride of the father/son, maimed in contemporary society and left over as the virgin daughter-goddess, Athena, the product of the father-god's mind.

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27. Η Μεγάλη Αμερικανική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια, VIII, 167.

## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Έφη Α. Λαμπαδαρίδου, *Ο μύθος της παρθένας - Μητέρας - Θεάς στο διήγημα του Πάτρικ Γουάιτ «Νεκρά τριαντάφυλλα»*

Το έργο του Πάτρικ Γουάιτ δεν είχε ερμηνευτεί πριν το 1986 — όταν εκδόθηκε η διατριβή της Ε. Α. Λαμπαδαρίδου με τον τίτλο: *Patrick White: Magna Mater and Her Son - lover* — σαν η επιφάνεια που σκεπάζει τη παλινδρόμηση του σύγχρονου καλλιτέχνη στις ρίζες του Δυτικού πολιτισμού, ή τη στροφή του συνειδητού στο ασυνείδητο της ανθρωπίνης ψυχής. Έτσι πρώτη φορά αναφέρεται ότι ο White βρίσκει ότι η επικράτηση πατριαρχικών φυλών με όλα τα συνακόλουθά της στη θρησκεία και κοινωνία χάλασε την ισορροπία πνεύματος και σώματος στο άτομο που εκφραζόταν με τις θρησκείες της φύσης.

Το διήγημα στηρίζεται στον πανάρχαιο συμβολισμό της μητέρας-θεάς Αφροδίτης, και του νεαρού εραστή της με το κόκκινο τριαντάφυλλο, που πέρασε από την Ανατολική Μεσόγειο στην Ελλάδα πριν την 2η χιλιετηρίδα π.Χ. Κατά τον Γουάιτ — και τους κορυφαίους Freud, Jung και Campbell — η Μεγάλη Μητέρα με τον γιο-εραστή της είναι η καλλίτερη απεικόνιση των αντίθετων δυνάμεων που συγκρούονται-ανώννται-χωρίζουν αέναα σε ένα χορό γέννησης ζωής-θανάτου-αναγέννησης στο σύμπαν. Το γεγονός ότι τα δύο αντίθετα έγιναν θρησκεία αντανάκλα την ολοκλήρωση του ατόμου που τα οραματίστηκε σαν προσωποποίηση αγάπης, σοφίας και ειρήνης.

Το διήγημα «Νεκρά τριαντάφυλλα», όμως, περιέχει τον απόηχο της νεκρής Μητέρας μετά την υποβάθμιση της γυναίκας στη κοινωνία, και την αποπομπή της από τις μεγάλες θρησκείες που δημιουργήθηκαν ύστερα από την 2η χιλιετηρίδα π.Χ. Ο Γουάιτ εντοπίζει τη παλινδρόμηση του στην Ελλάδα για δύο λόγους: πρώτα, γιατί η Ελλάδα είναι η ρίζα του Δυτικού πολιτισμού και δεύτερα, γιατί μόνο στην Ελλάδα η ισχυρότατη μυστικιστική τάση των ιθαγενών λαών κατάφερε να επιζήσει μετά την Αρεία κατάκτηση στα Ελληνικά Μυστήρια. Αυτός ήταν ο λόγος που επιτεύχθηκε η ένωση του λογικού των Αρείων και η φαντασία των ιθαγενών στη ποίηση του Ομήρου και τη χρυσή τομή που ενώνει το φως της διάνοιας με τα σκοτεινά ανθρώπινα ένστικτα στις μορφές Απόλλωνα και Διόνυσου, όπως τη γνωρίζουμε από τις τέχνες στη Κλασική Ελλάδα.

Ο Γουάιτ ξεκινά από τη θρησκεία, το ανθρώπινο δημιουργήμα που αντανάκλα τη μορφή της κοινωνίας και της ανθρωπίνης ψυχής με τις αντίρροπες δυνάμεις τους, δηλ. το πνεύμα της εποχής. Και με τον τίτλο του διηγήματος αυτού εκφράζει τη διαπίστωσή του πως η Μητέρα-Θεά είναι νεκρή στις σύγχρονες κοινωνίες, στις θρησκείες και στα

άτομα. Γιατί ο Χριστιανισμός — διασταύρωση του Ιουδαϊσμού και της θρησκείας της Μητέρας-Θεάς στην Παλαιστίνη — που είναι η σχεδόν αποκλειστική θρησκεία της Δύσης — υποθαμίζει τη μητέρα του Χριστιανού Γιου-Θεού σε κοινή θνητή, η οποία, όμως, διατηρεί το σώμα της αμόλυντο, γιατί γονιμοποιείται από το Λόγο του Πατέρα-Θεού. Με την ίδια αναλογία το πάνθεο των Ολυμπίων είχε παραμορφώσει την αρχικά Μητέρα-Θεά Αθηνά σε παρθένο που γεννήθηκε όχι από μήτρα, αλλά το κεφάλι — δηλ. τη διάνοια, το πνεύμα — του πατριάρχη Δία. Η επιτυχημένη αναφορά στις δύο παρθένες, που στη μητριαρχία ήταν μητέρες του θεϊκού γιού, κρύβεται στο όνομα της πρωταγωνίστριας “Anthea” — η Μεγάλη Μητέρα της Ανατολικής Μεσογείου Αφροδίτη Ανθέα — το οποίο αλλάζει σε “Athena” με αναγραμματισμό. Ο Γουάιτ δημιουργεί τους χαρακτήρες του πάνω σε αρχέτυπα των δύο μυθολογιών που έζησαν παράλληλα στην αρχαία Ελλάδα — που ο Νίτσε πρώτος παρατήρησε στο έργο *Η γέννηση της τραγωδίας*. Ακόμα σαρκάζει μαζί με τον Sir James Frazer στο έργο του *The Golden Bough* το Χριστιανικό κήρυγμα για ασκητισμό με τη καταδίκη του σώματος που συμβολίζει τη Μητέρα-Θεά. Ευτυχώς που το ανθρώπινο γένος, λέει ο Frazer, αρνήθηκε να απαρνηθεί τις χαρές του σώματος, γιατί αλλιώς θα εξέλιπε. Και τέλος ο Γουάιτ υπερθεματίζει με τον ισχυρισμό ότι ο άνθρωπος πρέπει να επιδιώξει με την εμπειρία των θίσιων και αδυναμιών του να γνωρίσει τέλεια το σώμα του και αν θέλει να αποκτήσει σοφία, να καεί με τα αστροπελέκια της εμπειρίας και να γίνει κι αυτός ένας από τους καμένους (the burnt ones).