

CHAPTER TWELVE

MILITANTLY IRONIC CLAUDIUS OR SATIRIC HERO IN FIVE MOVEMENTS

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Pursuant to Hayden White's line of reasoning, historical consciousness is a set of assumptions from which a historian departs in his or her writerly investigations of past events. Albeit not blatantly obvious at first glance, they can be pinpointed on the basis of a structural analysis of a given text. White avers that, structurally, a historical text is organized on three levels, i.e. emplotment, formal argument, and ideological implication; as well as prefigured by the trope one writes within. The level of emplotment, of shaping a story in the form of either romance, satire, comedy or tragedy, showcases the author's view on humanity. And thus, a romantic history is a drama of self-identification with the hero vanquishing evil. Satiric accounts highlight a protagonist who fails in his quest to win against his or her nefarious adversaries. Comedies laud harmony between the natural and the social, whereas tragedies stage a protagonist whose demise brings him or her – but also the reader – “the epiphany of the law governing human existence.”¹ My intention is to use White's emplotment theory as a

¹ Hayden White, *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 1-9. I do realize that there are other possible types of emplotment. However, my sticking to White's taxonomy is dictated by the assumptions that, first, construing Graves's novels as sagas or horrors, etc. would be a misconception as there seem to be no textual signals encouraging such interpretations; second, certain genres, for example urban fiction, emerged years after Graves wrote his works; third, the writer and his critics have already emphasized Graves's affinities with the ironic-driven genres.

As for the remaining two levels, they disclose the author's concept of truth and the past-present relation. These, however, as well as the trope that frameworks all the

point of departure for an analysis of selected fragments of Robert Graves's *I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God*² in order to substantiate the thesis that the Gravesian hero is a satiric hero who uses irony to manage the real.

Gravesian Claudius is one of those figures who keep – as if purposely and perversely – eschewing any clear-cut characterisation. On the one hand, he purports to offer us a from-egg-to-apple history of his life. Yet the subtitle of the first volume of his autobiography reveals that the work is in fact an aggregate of excerpts rather than a full-scale account of Claudius's life. Even though he starts it with an I-am-going-to-describe-my-life phrase, what follows is a hotchpotch of data on the bulk of the Julio-Claudian line. Still, the reader's consternation is intensified when one becomes aware that on top of the protagonist's vertiginous disclosing of self-contradictory information, there is also his incessant ironizing that *de facto* overturns almost everything the emperor jots down. Nonetheless, what can be said about him with no ifs, ands, or buts is that from a crippled well-wisher of the Republic and a laughingstock Claudius becomes an emperor. He plays the role for the rest of his life and towards its end is excruciatingly cuckolded by Messalina and then voluntarily steered by Agrippina.³

The above warrants the illation that from the metahistorical perspective construing Claudius as a romantic or comic hero would be downright counterfactual. He neither triumphs over evil nor establishes any comity between the natural and the social.⁴ The question to take stock of then is whether he is designed as a satiric or tragic hero. Although thus far, Gravesian criticism has pigeonholed Claudius as a tragic hero, in the ensuing paragraphs I would like to impugn this slant and suggest reading him as a satiric hero who uses irony to manage the real.

levels, are not of interest of this work and hence are skipped.

² Graves's texts are considered historical novels and hence fall within the ambit of White's concepts that are designed for an analysis of historical texts *sensu largo*. See Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in: *Narrative Dynamics: Essays on Time, Plot, Closure, and Frames. Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series*, ed. Brian Richardson (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002), pp. 191-210, especially p. 194.

³ Robert Graves, *I, Claudius* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) and *Claudius the God and His Wife Messalina* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984).

⁴ This does not mean that Claudius lacks any romantic or comic traits. I am far from boiling Claudius down to a single-trait character. His love for Messalina might be considered romantic, whereas his blindness to her promiscuity is comic. I would rather argue that Claudius's leading trait is the satiric one, though it is definitely complemented with other features.

Without subtilizing individual arguments deployed by Gravesian critics, let me note that none of the critics have rendered any tragedy-specific criteria which Claudius would reach or not and thus given a sound rationale for treating him as a tragic hero. Their recurring assertion is based on the syllogistic fallacy that since poisoning equals tragic death and Claudius departed his life this way, he is a tragic hero.⁵ Bearing the above in mind, I would like to use Hayden White's idea of the tragic protagonist to discuss the presence of the tragic elements in Graves's implicit concept of the hero.

According to White, tragic histories spotlight the hero whose fiasco brings him or her – but also the audience – “the epiphany of the law governing human existence.”⁶ Inasmuch as I do veer towards the claim that the Gravesian hero fails to a great extent to achieve the main goal he sets for himself, i.e. reestablishment of the Republic, the disaster enlightens neither Claudius himself nor his readers as to what the potential “law governing human existence” might be.⁷ As will be shown below, Claudius's failure demonstrates that, actually, there is no “law” of human existence. According to my understanding, the protagonist's life is permeated with the tragic, but is not tragic *sensu largo*.⁸

Having demonstrated why the Gravesian hero cannot be construed as either romantic, comic or tragic, I would like to assay whether White's idea of satiric protagonist can be applicable. To that end, in the two ensuing paragraphs I consider whether Claudius could potentially be, as it is held in metahistorical optics, a figure whose struggle with evil ends with an epiphanyless debacle.⁹

⁵ Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves (Writers and Their Work 78)* (Harlow: Longman Group, 1970), pp. 8-11; Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), pp. 86-89; Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves* (New York: Ungar, 1979), pp. 173-188; Ian Firla, *The Narrative Structures of Robert Graves' Historical Fiction: A Progression Toward a Conception of the Hero in History* (Leicester: University of Leicester, 1998), pp. 163-202.

⁶ White, *Metahistory*, p. 9.

⁷ Claudius does not present one – as has been mentioned, Graves tends to “leave (as in despair) [m]otive and end and moral in the air” – and neither do his critics – thus far, no critic has ventured to impute a law of human existence to Graves. The White Goddess Myth that frames Graves's writings cannot be said to give such a law, and it is chronologically later than the novels discussed.

⁸ These ontological statements are inferential from the text.

⁹ White, *Metahistory*, p. 11: “Tragedy and Satire are modes of emplotment which are consonant with the interest of those historians who perceive behind or within the welter of events contained in the chronicle an ongoing structure of relationships or an eternal return of the Same and the Different.” Although White's words do not

It has already been hinted that the son of Drusus grows into an ardent backer of the Republican system. Having been given the proponents of the *ancien régime* as role models and educated in the area of the Republican thought in his youth, Claudius becomes convinced that a reintroduction of the Republic is the prerequisite for the Roman nation to thrive. Nonetheless, having been given the emperors and the moribund country to safeguard, Claudius does not backtrack from his wish, but resolves that to better the future of fellow Romans he needs to exercise his power. Only when emperors as a method of working towards the better future of the nation transpires to be unworkable, does the hero resume the task of ending the reign of the Julio-Claudians once and for all. Monarchy, however, so deeply rooted in the minds of his fellow Romans, strikes back and the protagonist turns out finally to be incapable of eradicating it with his own hands.¹⁰

Accordingly, Gravesian Claudius emerges as, first, a fighter for a good cause who, by and large, loses the fight, and consequently, as a satiric hero who fails to overcome his pro-monarchistic adversaries. His words and deeds might then justifiably be interpreted in terms of the satiric hero's "attempts to give form to the shifting ambiguities and complexities of unidealized existence."¹¹ The attempts, which according to Northrop Frye, on whom White models his theories, reflect the typical development path this figure follows, the path that starts with recognition of the conditions one has been plunged into, then leads to questioning existing values, testing of the protagonist's own concepts, which ultimately collapse under the burden of experience, and at last ends with yielding to "this blasted world of repulsiveness and idiocy, a world without pity and without hope."¹²

As has already been set down, Claudius's autobiography opens with a series of "from egg to apple"¹³ stories which familiarise us with ancient

pertain to the hero question directly, they might serve as a secondary argument in emphasizing his satirical provenance. In the end, if White pairs tragedy and satire with perceiving the world in terms of an eternal return, and Graves's myth of the White Goddess is an eternal return story through the prism of which he sees the world, then his hero is prone to be either a satiric or a tragic one.

¹⁰ Graves, *I, Claudius*, and *Claudius the God*, passim. What is perhaps most ironic about Claudius's failure is that inasmuch as *his work* to dismantle monarchy is in vain, his turning passive helps Nero become the final nail in the monarchy's coffin.

¹¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 223.

¹² Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 239.

¹³ Graves, *I, Claudius*, p. 32.

Rome at the dawn of the A.D. From its very first pages we are deluged with an enormous amount of oftentimes self-contradictory and/or inconsistent fine points and niceties about virtually every member of the Julio-Claudian house as if Claudius craved – rather unsuccessfully – to catalogue his world into a neat and all-comprehensive whole.¹⁴ More than that, each piece of information he divulges is followed by an irony that leads him to disclose a contradictory datum, which is also followed by another irony. In one go, we can find out that Claudius's grandmother Livia is capable of the utmost disdain, and yet she crafts atrocious retaliations if her pride is hurt even slightly; that even though Augustus is the sovereign, Livia is the one who pulls the strings in Rome; that she evinces no interest in her spouse or love affairs, but begrudges her stunning sister-in-law, overdresses and toys with men; that, by all accounts, she works twenty-four hours a day to the benefit of the empire, though sees no problem in poisoning the cream of Rome's citizens.¹⁵

Commencing with idealistic wishful thinking to pen a true, year-by-year and all-encompassing story of his life,¹⁶ Claudius comes forth with a *de facto* selective picture of “a world which is full of anomalies, injustices, follies, and crimes, and yet is permanent and undisplaceable.”¹⁷ It might be reckoned that the actual initial gesture made by both Claudius and his perplexed reader is that of reading and depicting humanity as reason-driven, purposeful, consistent; of exerting oneself to make it logical. Graves seems to write between the lines that, just as Claudius is thrown into the midst of the all's-fair carnage carried out by the Julio-Claudians and coerced to play by their rules,¹⁸ so, upon coming to this world, an individual is introduced to the existing state of affairs, the alleged validity of which he or she is kept being assured, and relentlessly pressed to concede. Accordingly, being forced to adapt to the surroundings means being compelled to recognize the world's values and internal logic, and, to

¹⁴ John Woodrow Presley, “Narrative Structure in Graves' Historical Fiction,” *Gravesiana*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (June 1997), pp. 292-304, especially p. 293.

¹⁵ Graves, *I, Claudius*, pp. 14-40.

¹⁶ Graves, *I, Claudius*, p. 9. Ironically, the full subtitle of the first volume of the emperor's autobiography is: *I, Claudius. From the Autobiography of Tiberius Claudius Emperor of the Romans Born 10 B.C. Murdered and Deified 54 A.D.* Hence, Claudius self-contradicts himself from the very beginning of his work – either it is a collection of excerpts from his life or a comprehensive study of what happened to him.

¹⁷ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 226.

¹⁸ Graves, *I, Claudius*, p. 47: “And supreme power for [Livia] had come to be more important than life or honour; she had sacrificed so much for it.”

translate them onto himself or herself. Having assimilated the rendered *modus operandi* allows one survive in it; and in order to survive Claudius embraces brutal pragmatism and pretends to be an idiot.¹⁹ Survival, however, is not the endpoint, but the point of departure for the Gravesian hero. An individual, in Gravesian perspective, is not to get stuck in history and remain inert until his or her last days, but to thread his or her way through the absurd world by means of irony. The greatest irony of Claudius's youth, i.e. thoughtful recasting of himself into a harmless fool, not only secures his place among the other Julio-Claudians, but also aids him in educating himself into a scholar, adroit and proficient enough to undermine both the logic and the values he has been forced to embrace.

Having recognized and settled in the existing conditions, the hero moves on to the second step on his path, i.e. to impugning the values on which his world has been built. And just as the inceptive vertiginous part of the narration parallels Claudius's frenzied attempts to make sense of the world, so this part is structured to reflect the "critical" stage of his development. Let us remember, however, that the protagonist is not a simpleton who would indulge in writing flares razing his fellow Romans to the ground. Instead of these, one can discern a qualitative and quantitative emphasis shift in the narration structure. In the forty-one pages of the first four chapters of his autobiography, Claudius lists by name at least seventy-one characters and alludes to a myriad of unnamed individuals and social groups.²⁰ Such an aggregate of individuals and events, and hence a narrative hotchpotch, melts then into three strands, each of them bringing into a focus the reign of a successive emperor.

Claudius's scrutinies of the selected aspects of Augustus's, Tiberius's, and Caligula's administrations of the Roman empire are subdivided and shaped in a self-consciously scholarly fashion. Recounting the times when "Augustus ruled the world, but Livia ruled Augustus,"²¹ the protagonist labours over the advantages and disadvantages of different methods of schooling, renders a longitudinal study of amendments in the Roman religious and marital law, and puts forward a solution how to reconcile history and literature.²² A closer look at these segments divulges that each

¹⁹ Graves, *I, Claudius*, p. 9. "I am supposed to be an utter fool and the more I read the more of a fool they think me."

²⁰ Graves, *I, Claudius*, pp. 9-50. It would not be amiss to state that the hero spotlights almost all Julio-Claudians back to Julius Caesar, his friends and tutors. He refers more or less directly to all the social groups of the Rome of his times, as well as to numerous gods, intellectuals, and foreigners that seem relevant to him.

²¹ Graves, *I, Claudius*, p. 24.

²² Graves, *I, Claudius*, pp. 54-150.

of them realizes the context-thesis-line-of-arguments-conclusion pattern. For example, when the hero reminisces about his tutors and the effects of their teaching, the point of departure for him is the juvenile ill-treatment he suffered from his kin. Being openly denigrated, Claudius advances the blatantly personal thesis that a teacher's severity impairs the student's personal development. To substantiate it, he provides a tally contrasting the astringent and punitive teachers who inculcated very little, if anything, in him (Cato, Sulpicius), with mild-tempered, patient and amicable ones who instilled a true thirst for knowledge in him (Athenodorus, Livy). It should come as no surprise that the sequiturs closing his divagations are that acerbic Sulpicius "proved to be an invaluable assistant," and benign Athenodorus became his true life-long friend.²³

Riveting our attention not so much to what Claudius tells us – in the end his mini-stories bring up various topics – but to how he recounts it, we might observe that these passages are, in fact, a set of critical lectures. Recognition of the cracks, anomalies and inadequacies of his "logical" world leads the hero to embark on an intellectual quest to investigate, and in fact delegitimize, the existing state of affairs. To achieve his goal, the protagonist persists in disclosing how the appearances he faces are different from the real. Claudius ironizes, for instance, Cato's practice of exploiting animals as well as slaves and then selling them to reap the last benefit out of the dying creatures. He points out how stupid, cruel and uneconomical it is and suggests a logically superior way of managing animals and slaves.²⁴ In this case, the implication of Graves's text might be that seeing shortcomings of the existing values/logic does not equal leaving them at the drop of a hat. In a slightly Nietzschean vein, Graves might be telling us that criticising, i.e. the second step his hero takes, means embracing the same values, but in a new way.

The third step, the testing period, commences for Claudius when the Sybil-augured fate claims him and raises him to the imperial office. Having already jettisoned the workings of the contemporary, the hero is therefore provided with a unique opportunity to test his own theories and brainchildren about the real in practice. Accordingly, the ventures he undertakes might be obviously construed as attempts to pluck his strife-ridden and financially-drained country out of the anguish induced by Caligula, to, finally, see that: "[p]rosperity was returning to Rome, justice was being evenly dispensed, the people were contented, our armies were victorious abroad."²⁵ However, more importantly from the perspective of

²³ Graves, *I, Claudius*, pp. 52-66, 138.

²⁴ Graves, *I, Claudius*, pp. 58-59.

²⁵ Graves, *Claudius the God*, p. 190.

this thesis, Claudius's endeavours might be also perceived as realizations of his hypotheses on moulding history. Let us examine then the emperor's retrofitting aqueducts and the port of Ostia²⁶ – i.e. his paramount achievements – in terms of an individual's attempts at proactive history making.

Bestowing “water and winter bread” on the Romans, or in other words putting aqueducts and the port of Ostia at their disposal, is hailed as Claudius's prime executive success.²⁷ The reason behind building new aqueducts is that inasmuch as the affluent citizens of the capital have free access to fresh water, the poor ones are forced to use the Tiber slop. Having learned about the situation, the benign emperor wishes to remedy it. Apparently certain that noble gestures and logical solutions would suffice in this case, Claudius takes pains for nine years to finish the project. After nine years, he is however, forced to admit that despite his best efforts water-stealing has returned.²⁸

Ostia's general overhaul is also meant as a step towards building a bright future of the empire. Since each poor winter harvest spells hunger for the Romans, revamping the port to take in ships from Egypt and Africa could have a salutary effect. As public-spirited and high-minded as such a stratagem might seem, the Roman “practicality” verifies it in its own fashion. Even before it starts, the work is over-budgeted for ten years and ten million gold pieces. Only thanks to his presence of mind does Claudius recall some old blueprints that give different estimations, and badgers his engineers to revise their totalling. After these preliminary perturbations, the works kick off with the anticipated four-year and four million gold pieces schedule. Ten years later and at the cost of twelve million gold pieces Claudius, finally, has Ostia operating.²⁹

Should we wish to delve into the narrative structure of the adduced episodes – but also of other ventures the emperor embarks on – once again a recurrent pattern might be discerned. When Gravesian Claudius finds

²⁶ Graves, *Claudius the God*, pp. 86-102, 131-140, 143-146, 149-153, 211-265, 323-324, 344-349. Claudius works also on amending the law, instituting the Saecular Games and invading Germany and Britain.

²⁷ Graves, *I, Claudius*, p. 17.

²⁸ Graves, *Claudius the God*, pp. 150-152.

²⁹ Postponements of the works resulted, on the one hand, from scheming on the part of corn producers who wanted the prices of corn to remain high even at the cost of hunger throughout the empire. On the other hand, the island linking two [sic!] moles could not be made as cement powder did not set in sea-water. However, when Claudius accidentally threatened his engineers, they came up with the solution. Graves, *Claudius the God*, pp. 140-146, 323-324.

himself in a predicament, he tries to escape it by coming up with the most sagacious solution possible. A prior in-depth and punctilious analysis of the *status quo* – as in the case of the Rhine frontier – a lightbulb moment – vide reminding himself of old aqueducts designs³⁰ – or some other form of ratiocination enables him to save the day. Ultimately, however, the irony of all these exertions is that they prove futile. Remedying one shortcoming transpires not only interim, but also reveals even more problems. On the basis of the above, it might be inferred that if Graves lays out a series of logical failures, he also editorializes on logic as a shattered ideal. Introduced to the world, the Gravesian historical hero is capable of recognizing its logical shortcomings, but incapable of remedying them. The limiting rules, laws, customs, and etiquette he confronts are handily critiqued and replaced with his own superior logic, standards, norms and laws, which, ironically, fail as well. As logically sophisticated as one can ever be, in Gravesian texts, the logician emerges as merely a stage to be departed in an individual's development.

Claudius's recognition of the impossibility of devising a logical law governing human existence – the fourth phase of the satirical hero's development – comes dressed up in the tunic of Messalina. Revelation of her perfidious sell-outs shatters the hero, and teaches him that, whatever reasonable plan he might concoct to better his life and the lives of Roman citizens, it is certain to fail, one way or another. Claudius longs to love and to be loved and, though he does his level best, he ends up being hated by Messalina. He longs for friendship and strikes it up with Herod, who turns against him in the end. He wants to revive the Republic, but becomes an emperor whom some consider, with good reasons, to be a tyrant.³¹

By shining a light on these ironies, Graves seems to tell us that logic-generated theories of human behaviour, sophisticated moral concepts, ideals and virtues crash helplessly against the irrational, ever-changing and pragmatic reality, which allows only for one truth. This truth seems to be revealed in the constatation that Claudius offers at the very end of the following story:

It appears that Phaemon the philosopher had a little dog whom he had trained to go to the butcher every day and bring back a lump of meat in a basket. This virtuous creature, who would never dare to touch a scrap until Phaemon gave it permission, was one day set upon by a pack of mongrels who snatched the basket from its mouth and began to tear the meat to pieces and bolt it greedily down. Phaemon, watching from an upper

³⁰ Graves, *Claudius the God*, pp. 131-146, 323-324.

³¹ Graves, *Claudius the God*, pp. 131-146, 323-324.

window, saw the dog deliberate for a moment just what to do. It was clearly no use trying to rescue the meat from the other dogs: they would kill it for its pains. So it rushed in among them and itself ate as much of the meat as it could get hold of. In fact it ate more than any of the other dogs, because it was both braver and cleverer.³²

By adducing this story, Claudius appears to intimate that the first thing one faces upon coming to this world is coercion. Like a little dog, one is trained to acquiesce to the existent *modus operandi*. Then, schooled by the intellectually loftier to espouse their widely-acknowledged ratiocinations, an individual is thrown into the cage of reason, where he or she functions according to the instilled logical explanations of the real. (Un)fortunately, the real keeps striking back and keeps divulging that even the most elaborate, but always and unavoidably over-idealized, theories are bound to come to naught. However, having certain values, notions and categories drummed into him, the human being fights for them – just as Claudius wrestled for a better future with the mongrels of the Claudian family³³ – doggedly shutting out the possibility they are nonviable, unattainable and/or maladjusted to the real. This “war of attrition” between the hero logicising everything and the all-subverting real lasts as long as Claudius is capable of hoping for a better future and hence of exerting himself to come up with ever more logical solutions to his maladies. In the light of the above, the disclosures of Herod’s turning back on the hero and Messalina’s *tours de force* can not only be construed as events personally scarring the emperor, but more importantly, as lessons in ethical aporia. Mentally petrified by this gap, Claudius grows stagnant.³⁴ Trusting himself to the hands of Narcissus, marrying Agrippinilla, becoming indifferent to his ventures, backing down from restoring the Republic with his own hands and remitting the task to his son Britannicus are symptomatic of his mental state.³⁵

Nonetheless, as I have already suggested, the Gravesian hero is not a tragic hero. Sliding into relativism is, for him, not a preface to self-destruction. “Tragedy and tragic irony take us into a hell of narrowing circles and culminate in some such vision of the source of all evil in a

³² Graves, *Claudius the God*, p. 407.

³³ The fight Graves seems to describe is that of the hero ever failing to make his world logical and ever exerting himself more and more to improve his ratiocinations. In Gravesian optics, logic becomes a tool used to legitimise values humanity would like to see as rational. Values emerge as the aftermath of one’s whims and wishes.

³⁴ Graves, *Claudius the God*, p. 384: “A man can’t die twice of the same disease.”

³⁵ Graves, *Claudius the God*, pp. 384-416.

personal form. Tragedy can take us no farther; but if we preserve with the *mythos* of irony and satire, we shall pass a dead center,”³⁶ wisecracks Northrop Frye about the fifth stage of the satiric hero development. And the irony that preserves Claudius lies in that Britannicus’s rejection of the emperor’s will makes him do an about-face on all he has represented in his life. With no hope to save Rome from tyranny, but with the understanding that the real does not operate in accordance to any logical rules, but rather shifts from one state to another, “swifter than reason,” Claudius decides on a brave and clever manoeuvre to escape his “golden predicament.” Sacrificing Britannicus and helping Nero succeed him is to boost tyranny to reach its greatest extreme and, hence bring about its own end as well as open up new possibilities. Failing to thwart tyranny with his own hands is not the end for the hero. Seeing the core of “this blasted world of repulsiveness and idiocy, a world without pity and without hope [enables Claudius] to see the stars again” and steer the world towards them.³⁷

Gravesian Claudius is a (Shakespearean) fool who knows that he is one. As a youngster he casts himself as a fool that no one is willing to pay heed to and rises from a denigrated battleground of disease and infirmity to become a dexterous scholar. As an adult he horses around as Caligula’s jester and is one of the very few survivors of the bedlamite’s reign. As emperor he tries to abandon the role, but only harking back to it enables him to make his wishes “almost” come true. Consequently, it should come as no surprise to notice that these are ironies that make his life move on. Indeed, it is by means of irony that the hero manages the real.

That said, I would like to broaden my conclusions with an attempt to localize the Gravesian idea of the hero in the context of the philosophic and literary tendencies of his age. The pre-war ideal of man – the tamer of nature, master of reason, *homo faber*,³⁸ creator of highly sophisticated machines, rational animal and, most importantly, the moulder of history – was, metaphorically speaking, razed to the ground by the armed forces that trampled Europe. In the chaos of dissipating notions, beliefs and values that ensued, Robert Graves’s idea of man was in concert with the contemporaneous *Zeitgeist* yet also *sui generis*.

On the one hand, Graves appears to depart from the deterministic paradigms, such as the biological (Claudius is a “battleground of diseases” that push him down the chain of being), the logical (the hero tussles to

³⁶ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 239.

³⁷ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 239.

³⁸ Manuel B. Dy Jr., *Philosophy of Man. Selected Readings* (Quezon City: Goodwill Trading Co., Inc., 2001), p. 197.

rationalize his world), and the social (as a member of the Julio-Claudian house he cannot completely escape his obligations).³⁹ Graves designs Claudius to see himself as a rational and coherent being and makes him project this vision on his fellow Romans. The Roman Empire is also depicted as a machinery fuelled and orchestrated by godlike monarchs, whose power and wealth are the ultimate arguments in any issue.

On the other hand, what makes the Gravesian hero one of a kind is that he is capable not only of transcending the circumscriptions of his predicaments (from a stunted stammerer Claudius grows into an intellectual; from a rejected weakling, he arises to the rank of the emperor), but more importantly, when coming face to face with the annihilation of his dreams, the hero rises above his “world without pity and without hope [...] to see the stars again.”⁴⁰

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³⁹ Although John Randolph Lucas's division of determinisms, i.e. logical determinism, theological determinism, psychological determinism, and physical determinism, appears to be one of the most widely-accepted taxonomies, I would like to render a slightly different one, one tailored to the intricacies of Gravesian writings. See John R. Lucas, *The Freedom of the Will* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1970), pp. 51-66.

⁴⁰ Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 239.

White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975.

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