

## INTERLUDE IN MALLORCA

by Ward Ritchie

First I must tell of an interlude on the island of Mallorca. Paris is usually clammy and overcast during the winter months. At least it seemed miserable to me who had always lived in the warm climate of California. I heard of this island paradise in the Mediterranean whose climate approximated that of my native land. I went there for a holiday and to warm myself. In Palma I heard that there was a small English press operating across the island in the town of Deyá. In curiosity I wandered over there. I found it to be a delightful town, high over the blue sea. I lunched with a bottle of wine and began inquiring the whereabouts of the elusive English press. Each inquiry brought a curious addition to my retinue of followers as we searched through the town. A German I questioned gave me the first clue, saying, 'You mean Graves' press.' Then I realized that this must be the Seizin Press.

With my retinue, which by then comprised a good portion of the village, I found the house. It was perched high on a bank above the road. I ascended the stairs and pounded at the door, with no answer. Descending, I was ready to give up my search when there appeared on the bank above us a woman in full rage. She stood glowering down on our multitude, her sturdy legs spread wide in anger, her hands on her hips, her hair wild in the wind. She shouted down at us, 'What do you want?'

I answered meekly, 'I have been looking for the English press which I had heard was here in Deyá.' She calmed immediately, dismissed all of my retinue and led me to her study up in the back of the house. Seated behind her desk, her first question was, 'Do you know who I am?' Fortunately I had read Robert Graves' autobiography, Goodbye to All That, and I realized that this must be Laura Riding - and thus I answered.

She relaxed and we talked about the press and the bits they were printing and where they got their paper and the printer in Palma who set most of their type. She told me that so many people came only to see Graves that she became annoyed. Only last week, she said, she had thrown out Liam O'Flaherty, but my request had been so frank and specific - about the press - that she had allowed me to intrude. In time we left her study and wandered into the house

to see the press and their books. I asked her if she enjoyed printing. She answered, 'For me it's not fun. It's just plain work.'

Robert Graves, up from the beach, joined us for a few glasses of Sherry (though as I recall Laura Riding drank only tea), and though I never saw either of them again we corresponded for many years. As many of us did, we regretted the early death of the talented poet, Hart Crane. Laura Riding contemplated an elegy to him. I was eager to print it. However, it was never completed and instead she sent me a manuscript of a poem called Americans. I printed it and sometime later she sent me a copy of Focus, an informal little magazine which she and Robert occasionally printed on their hand press for their intimate friends.

In this issue she had written, 'The only thing that has happened from America has been the publication of my ill-tempered deliberately shabby little poem, Americans, which I wrote a year ago for a rather nice young man called Ward Ritchie, who has a press in California. He printed it beautifully, with forthright red adornments, and now I am feeling somewhat shamefaced - on his account, not the poems - because, without any suggestion of a whine, he has written to say how much he liked the Leaves, which I sent him, and how much he would have enjoyed being their printer. It was through Ward Ritchie, by the way, that the whole German situation arose here. He came to the village about four years ago, looking for the Seizin Press, mentioning my name and Robert's, and met the German called Herpes, who said, "Oh, you mean Graves' press." When he found us he was surprised to see me, having got the impression that I was no longer concerned. Which, of course, started a thing with Herpes, who said, "If a woman expects personal recognition she shouldn't live with a man in the same house." This went on to other subsequent bitter remarks, until one angry night Robert strode up to the village and into the café and slapped old Herpes' face. Whereupon all the Germans in Deyá were infected with a strong injured German-colony disease which has passed on from one season's German colony to the next in true post-war spirit.' I probably left Mallorca in the nick of time.