

## GLANVILLE-HICKS' NAUSICAA, GRAVES, AND REID

Several unpublished letters by Robert Graves and others in the Peggy Glanville-Hicks collection in the State Library of Victoria in Melbourne confirm Alan M. Cohn's hypothesis in the June 1974 Focus that Alastair Reid collaborated with Graves and Glanville-Hicks in preparing the libretto for her opera Nausicaa based on Graves' Homer's Daughter.<sup>1</sup> Professor Cohn's suspicions were raised by a note in the folder containing the Nausicaa libretto and information on the production and performers that accompanies the recording of excerpts from the opera's 1961 Athens productions: "In all reference to the libretto, credit must read: The libretto for Nausicaa has been arranged from the novel Homer's Daughter by Robert Graves."<sup>2</sup> Professor Cohn commented, "This is at least ambiguous."<sup>3</sup> The letters in the Melbourne library confirm that the statement—written by Glanville-Hicks—was intended to be ambiguous and at Reid's request. The letters also refer to animosity between Reid and Glanville-Hicks that led to his initial request not to be identified as librettist and then, when he consented (perhaps at Graves' request) to be named, caused her to let him remain anonymous.<sup>4</sup>

Graves and Glanville-Hicks remained on close and friendly terms. Glanville-Hicks, now 76 and living in Sydney, gave a radio interview there twelve years ago<sup>5</sup> in which she recalled that Graves travelled to Athens to attend the opera's three performances in August 1961. She was living in Athens then but it was his first visit, she recalled, and he commented that things had changed since ancient times. She also said that his daughter Lucia accompanied him to make sure he wore the proper evening attire, that he and Glanville-Hicks joined the performers on stage for curtain calls, and that one evening he was wearing one brown shoe and one black (in spite of Lucia).

As Professor Cohn has showed, Graves and Glanville-Hicks produced a first draft of the opera libretto on Mallorca in the summer of 1956. Before Nausicaa, Glanville-Hicks had prepared her own librettos entirely, so she probably arrived with a fairly clear idea of scenes from Graves' book that would be most effective from a dramatic or theatrical, that is, an operatic, point of view. Early in the fall of 1956, according to Cohn, Graves sent the draft to Alastair Reid with the request, "Please revise Nausicaa."<sup>6</sup>

Glanville-Hicks wrote later that, following preparation of a first draft, "The text was completed in New York during the fall of 1957, and revised during the following

summer as the writing of the music progressed and the form of the work took final shape.”<sup>7</sup> It is likely that it was Reid who “completed” the libretto; New York was Glanville-Hicks’ permanent residence at the time and Reid’s residence for part of each year. But as she began to write the music, especially “during the following summer” (1956) in Greece, she found that the text needed further revision in accordance with the opera’s “final shape.” There may have been libretto revisions after that as well. Time magazine reported after the performance in 1961 that Glanville-Hicks and Graves “worked intermittently for four years,”<sup>8</sup> presumably from 1956 to 1960, the date on Glanville-Hicks’s completed manuscript score. But correspondence among Graves, Glanville-Hicks, and Reid indicates that they all considered the libretto to be by Reid.

In 1959 Glanville-Hicks moved from New York to Athens and began to prepare for a production of Nausicaa. On September 1, 1959, Graves wrote to her that Reid, although he had agreed to do the libretto, wanted his name left off. She continued to work closely with her New York contacts to publicize the festival and the opera but, as she was to explain to Graves later (writing him on March 12, 1961), she changed the phrase she had been using so far, “Libretto by Alastair Reid after the novel ‘Homer’s Daughter’ by Robert Graves,”<sup>9</sup> to the ambiguous “Libretto after the novel ‘Homer’s Daughter’ by Robert Graves.” Some, however, did not perceive the ambiguity. Ross Parmenter at The New York Times published this announcement on Sunday, February 19, 1961, naming Graves alone:

“Nausicaa” ... is by Peggy Glanville-Hicks, Australian- American composer, and is based on Robert Graves’ “Homer’s Daughter.” The libretto, prepared by Mr. Graves, contends that the “Odyssey” was written by a woman and tells how she came to write it.<sup>10</sup>

Graves apparently did not see the Times article immediately, but Reid did, and Graves wrote to Glanville-Hicks on March 1, 1961, to report that Reid had told him in Madrid that Glanville-Hicks was careless in letting the publicity people think the libretto was principally by Graves, and therefore Reid wanted his name omitted. But Graves did not like the idea of permitting the libretto to become anonymous and asked her to apologize to Reid.

In another letter to Glanville-Hicks dated March 24, 1961, Graves said he had finally seen the Times notice of Nausicaa for himself. He found it awkward that the libretto was ascribed to him, but he said he would not publish a denial (*démenti*) because it was too complicated. He had evidently had further discussion or correspondence with Reid because he had learned that Reid’s original reasons for wanting his name omitted were partly professional (Glanville-Hicks had earlier hypothesized a desire on Reid’s part not to be known as a script writer) and partly personal, dating from an earlier unkind (Reid thought) remark by Glanville-Hicks.

In her reply to Graves' March 1 letter dated March 12 she assured him she had given nothing to the press but the revised (ambiguous) statement quoted above about the libretto's origins. She acknowledged that Reid felt hurt by the omissions and misrepresentations. She observed that Reid wanted the royalties for the libretto but still wanted his name struck from all scores and publicity.

It is possible that Glanville-Hicks did also apologize to Reid, for in a letter to her dated March 22, 1961, he gave his consent after all for his name to be used as librettist on the score and on announcements but said he wanted no publicity or programme notes about himself. He wrote that he took no interest in the matter and that he was glad the libretto pleased her although he had forgotten what it was like. But Glanville-Hicks, in spite of Graves' discomfort and in spite of Reid's express consent, never restored Reid's name to the Nausicaa libretto.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Alan M. Cohn, "Glanville-Hicks's Nausicaa and Graves (Higginson D76)," Focus on Robert Graves 4 (June 1974), pp. 71-73. The Peggy Glanville-Hicks collection is uncatalogued although many items are listed in Joel Crotty, "A Bibliographic Study on the Resources By and About Peggy Glanville-Hicks" (Unpublished Bachelor's thesis [Librarianship], Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, 1985) in the State Library of Victoria, Melbourne (Australia), MS 12092, Box 2588/6.

<sup>2</sup>Composers Recordings Inc., CRI 175. Glanville-Hicks prepared the information for the folder in 1961 but the recording was issued a couple of years later as Cohn has found.

<sup>3</sup>Cohn, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

<sup>4</sup>A staff member of the New Yorker magazine, which has published several of Reid's essays, confirmed to me in November 1988 that Reid indeed ceased to deny having collaborated with Graves on the libretto.

<sup>5</sup>The interview by Terry Torpey was broadcast on 2MBS-FM (Sydney) on September 19, 1977.

<sup>6</sup>Cohn, *op. cit.*, p.72.

<sup>7</sup>"Note on the Libretto and the Music," liner notes for CRI 175; this was also quoted by Cohn, pp. 71-72.

<sup>8</sup>"Robert Graves and Opera," Time, September 1, 1961, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup>This wording has been found in no published materials; it may have been used in her applications for funding for her composition of the music or in her correspondence with Greek cultural officials.

<sup>10</sup>"The World of Music. A New Homeric Opera for Ancient Greece," The New York Times, February 19, 1961, sect. 2, p. 9. Cohn noted an attribution to the composer herself in David Ewen, Composers Since 1900 (New York, 1969), p. 234.