

# The Robert Graves Society Mission Statement

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Literary Societies, like stars, have points of origin which everybody realises to be important but which no one can quite remember or describe. Literary Societies are sets of shared memories, maintained and refurbished by the energies of those who build them and take them forward, and in whose combined efforts objects and goals are given shape and definition. The origins of the Robert Graves Society lie in the determination of a loose network of individuals, including—crucially—members of his own family, to see that the life and works of Robert Graves were suitably commemorated in 1995, the centenary of his birth.

Interest in Robert Graves has been a feature of the landscape of 20th-century world literature for some considerable time, beginning with the powerful influence Graves exerted over an assortment of writers and scholars in his own lifetime, and including the several generations who lived and worked alongside him. His death in 1985 at the age of 90 produced a wave of renewed enthusiasm for Graves which enabled scholars and readers across the globe to discover a community of shared interest, embracing a diverse range of readers, artists and aca-

demics stimulated by the vast corpus of Graves' writings and keenly, if vaguely, intent upon the preservation and enhancement of his reputation.

Commemoration, however, is a difficult business. Every act of remembering is also an act of forgetting. With a body of work as immense as Graves', and a hugely varied readership, the idea of commemorating posed particular challenges. Discussions over a lengthy period, and the dedication of a small group of individuals, saw the gradual emergence of a consensus: the 1995 centenary of Graves' birth afforded a unique opportunity to focus attention both upon his achievements and his continuing importance and appeal.

The two major events which resulted from these deliberations excelled even the largest hopes of the organisers. As well as confirming the convictions of the network of scholars who had championed Graves for many years, the two centenary conferences, in Oxford and Deia, revealed extraordinarily high levels of interest in Graves and his writings, spanning several different generations of teachers, historians, literary critics, journalists and creative artists from across the world. Part of the excitement of the summer and autumn of 1995 undoubtedly lay in the discovery of the breadth of this enthusiasm for Graves, which embraced anthropology, mythography, religious studies, folklore, and military history, as well as literary criticism and the ever-expanding readership of Graves' fiction and poetry. The standards of scholarship and study at the two events were matched only by the tone of celebration, which carried participants beyond the experience of commemoration towards something more innovative and forward-looking.

The desire to create a Robert Graves Society had perhaps always been an impulse of the academic network that had defended Graves' reputation since his death. Nevertheless, it required the energy and clamour of the centenary events to galvanise people around this new endeavour. It became very clear in 1995 that the dynamism generated by the centenary could be properly and effectively channelled only by the creation of a literary society. The present initiative is the result of this recognition, and is undertaken in the belief that such a venture will give expression to the wishes of a potentially large membership, and harness the momentum of 1995 to a definitive project.

Essentially, the Robert Graves Society exists to promote understanding and appreciation of the achievements of Robert Graves, and to enable its members to deepen their exploration of his writings and his

career. It pursues these goals in the belief that enhanced awareness of the work of Robert Graves extends the boundaries of our understanding of 20th-century literature and some of the central ideas and experiences which have informed it. It will be part of the mission of the Society to place the life and work of Robert Graves in a broader historical context which takes full account of the literary culture which influenced him, and was influenced by him, during and after his long, productive lifetime.

The main purpose of the Society will be the encouragement of the study and enjoyment of the writings of Robert Graves, and this purpose will be furthered by the establishment through the Society of a forum for the sharing and exchange of scholarly and artistic responses to the many aspects of Graves' work as a writer and man of ideas. The Society will facilitate discussion, analysis, study and celebration of the life and work of Robert Graves through the support of research programmes, conferences, and regional events such as seminars and lectures. The Society will exist to serve its members in relation to their shared interest in Robert Graves, and will seek every opportunity to bring them together at local, national and international gatherings. It will also act as a clearing house for information about Graves-related publications, disseminate information for and from book-seekers and book-sellers, maintain a site on the World Wide Web with up-to-the-minute announcements, and maintain email lists for discussion groups on a variety of Gravesian topics.

One of the key objectives of the Society will be encouragement of publication of unpublished primary material and critical studies of Graves and his circle. This objective places an important obligation on the Society and its members to support other agencies and initiatives expressly created for the advancement of the reputation of Robert Graves, principally The Saint John's College Robert Graves Trust. The aims and objectives of the Society enjoy the full endorsement of the Trust.

Membership of the Robert Graves Society will be open to any individual with an interest in Robert Graves. The fee for membership will be £15.00 sterling or \$25, with a portion of the fees (£5.00 or \$7.50) to be returned to the St John's College Trust, and the remainder to be used to support the activities of the Society, including the publication and distribution costs of a society periodical, the ongoing work of the Robert Graves Database project, and the promotion of the Society to as wide an audience as possible. There are perks to being a member

which include a kind and generous offer from Harvey Sarnier for a discount of 10% on the price of his books listed on the Graves Society Web site.

The founders of the Society, and the Editorial Board firmly believe that the appreciation of Robert Graves has reached a watershed. A writer who was concerned to address many of the central preoccupations of the 20th-century, and who rooted this concern in a reverence for the deepest storehouses of our past, commands continuing attention as we prepare for the dawn of a new millennium, in which many of his most fundamental insights into our era and our condition will be seen to possess abiding meaning and relevance.

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