

# 'The Moon's my constant mistress':

## Robert Graves and the Elizabethans

Roger Bourke

University of Western Australia, Crawley

In 1927, Robert Graves received an invitation from the Australian writer Jack Lindsay, who was running a tiny private press from a rented room near the British Museum. Lindsay asked Graves to write the introduction to a collection the Fanfrolico Press intended to publish of the Elizabethan ballad 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song', drawings and etchings of Tom o' Bedlam by his father, the artist Norman Lindsay, and various seventeenth-century 'mad-poems':

I wrote to Graves, who promptly called on us. A tall rawboned slightly gaunt fellow, with a touch of the wilderness about him, like a mountain-dog trying to keep his tail up among the city-tykes. I liked him at once. He said that he already had ideas about the ballad and would be delighted to write the essay.<sup>1</sup>

The book, *Loving Mad Tom*, appeared later that year. In it, Graves provided an annotated text of 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' from a transcript of a 1615 manuscript supplied by Lindsay.<sup>2</sup> And he concluded his introductory essay on a dramatic note by suggesting that the ballad itself was nothing less than an unattributed work of Shakespeare's – a lost song from *King Lear* (1604–5). Whatever its provenance, 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' occupied a special place in Graves's poetic thinking for many years. He described it as both 'the most "purely poetic" of all anonymous English compositions' and as a 'perfect compendium' of moon-goddess worship. In a letter to Alan Hodge of July 1943 – which appears to contain Graves's earliest reference to what would soon become *The White Goddess* – he wrote:

I have been worried about thinking about poetry and finding that all the poems that one thinks of as most poetic in the romantic style are all intricately concerned with primitive moon worship. This sounds crazy, and I fear for my sanity; but it is so. The old English ballads [...] are all composed with a sort of neurosis-compulsion for arranging things in threes [...] which is the chief characteristic of the Moon Goddess – Triple Goddess – ritual; and the 17th-century *Loving Mad Tom* poem, which is generally regarded as the most 'purely poetic' of all anonymous English compositions is a perfect compendium of Ashtaroth–Cybele–Hecate worship – not a single element omitted.<sup>3</sup>

Graves writes of the ballad in *The White Goddess*: 'Anonymous English balladists constantly celebrate the Goddess's beauty and terrible power. *Tom o' Bedlam's Song* is directly inspired by her.'<sup>4</sup> In 1949, Graves reprinted his *Loving Mad Tom* essay in the first collection of his writings on poetry, *The Common Asphodel*, and he returned to the ballad in the introduction to the title essay:

The poetic education given in the modern English literature class is meagre and wholly unpractical: it does not include a course in primitive religion, without a grounding in which such poems as *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, *The Ancient Mariner* and *Tom o' Bedlam's Song* yield only a small part of their sense [...].<sup>5</sup>

'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' is one of a group of anonymous popular ballads which appear in seventeenth-century manuscripts and chapbook anthologies that reflect the Elizabethan and Jacobean fascination with madness.<sup>6</sup> These ballads are written in the persona of the Bedlam beggar or Abraham-man – the same 'Poor Tom' character Edgar assumes in *King Lear* (hence Graves's identification of the ballad with the play) – or his female counterpart, Bess of Bedlam. They not only reflect popular contemporary notions of the causes of insanity – lovesickness, drunkenness, the influence of the moon – but share a common stock of classical imagery: mainly in the form of bawdy, knockabout parodies of the myths of Venus–Mars–Vulcan and Diana–Actaeon–Endymion. Of the surviving examples, as Graves seems to have recognised, 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' is easily the most accomplished, both in its metrical control and in the sophistication of its wordplay, which revolves around a word rich in associations for the poets of the period: 'horn'.<sup>7</sup>

But is 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' a 'perfect compendium' of moon-goddess worship? The ballad does contain references to planetary deities: Apollo, Venus, Mars, and the moon. But it seems to lack not just any sense of religious invocation, but references to religious ritual of any kind. With the exception of the memorable line 'The Moon's my constant mistress', which can be read both as a statement of the folk-belief that lunatics are governed by the moon and as a learned play on the 'inconstant mistress' theme, precisely *what* elements of pagan goddess-ritual Graves finds in the ballad are not at all obvious. Does he regard popular superstition about the moon in seventeenth-century England as a survival of 'Triple Goddess' worship? Quite possibly. At least, this is what his letter to Alan Hodge seems to suggest. But although the connection Graves makes in the letter between 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' and 'Ashtaroth–Cybele–Hecate worship' seems, at best, extremely tenuous, his claim that the poetry of moon-goddess worship was being written during the English Renaissance is perfectly correct: there exists a substantial body, a sub-genre, of English poetry from the period that deals explicitly with precisely this theme. Yet, curiously, Graves refers to these poems only obliquely in *The White Goddess*.

The English Renaissance moon-poetry that Graves seems so unaccountably to overlook in *The White Goddess* was generated by the cult of Queen Elizabeth I as goddess of the moon. This cult eulogized Elizabeth under various names – Cynthia, Diana, Belphebe – and was instituted by Sir Walter Raleigh during his period as the ageing Queen's favourite in the 1580s. What Raleigh the courtier-poet began as a personal and private mode of celebration, his

friend Edmund Spenser introduced to the Elizabethan public, and the figure of the moon goddess became during the 1590s the most popular of all the symbols employed by the poets and painters who allegorized the Virgin Queen.<sup>8</sup> Raleigh wrote more than twenty 'poems to Cynthia', mostly unpublished during his lifetime, culminating in the *XIth and last Book of the Ocean to Cynthia* (?1593–94). Only a few of these actually employ lunar imagery; those that do, fuse the figures of Elizabeth, the classical goddess Diana–Cynthia (Mount Cynthus was the legendary birthplace of Diana),<sup>9</sup> and the moon into a single figure. At times, Raleigh's language is plainly that of religious invocation, as in the sonnet:

Prais'd be Diana's fair and harmless light,  
 Prais'd be the dewes wherewith she moistes the ground;  
 Prais'd be her beams, the glory of the night,  
 Prais'd be her power, by which all powers abound.<sup>10</sup>

Raleigh's cult of Elizabeth as Diana–Cynthia—the moon extended beyond the written word. Several artists portrayed the Queen as the virgin huntress Diana, complete with bow, arrows and hunting dogs, and Raleigh himself appears in a well-known portrait of 1588 in an elaborate costume of silver doublet and black cloak decorated with silver rays and pearls. The object of this black-and-silver cult, the moon, is shown in the top left-hand corner of the painting.<sup>11</sup>

Spenser adopted Raleigh's 'excellent conceipt' of Elizabeth as moon goddess and popularised the cult in his *Faerie Queene* (1590–96), in which the Queen appears allegorized as Gloriana and Belphoebe. In the letter to Raleigh that accompanied the first three books of the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser makes clear that he is following Raleigh's example:

In that Faery Queene I meane glory in my generall intention, but in my particular I conceive the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene, and her kingdome in Faery land. And yet in some places els, I do otherwise shadow her. For considering she beareth two persons, the one a most royall Queene or Empresse, the other a most vertuous and beautifull Lady, this latter part in some places I do expresse in Belphoebe, fashioning her name according to your owne excellent conceipt of Cynthia, (Phoebe and Cynthia being both names of Diana.)<sup>12</sup>

Spenser employs lunar imagery extensively in the *Faerie Queene*. He links it especially with the female knight Britomart, the central character of Book III, who is likened to 'faire Cynthia' – the moon – appearing from behind a cloud when she reveals her face by lifting the visor of her helmet (III.i.). Later in the poem, when Britomart visits the temple of the Egyptian goddess Isis, the priests wear 'Mitres shaped like the Moone / To shew that Isis doth the Moone

portend' (V.vii.). In the later 'Mutabilitie Cantos' (c. 1598), the goddess of the moon appears in person, in her heavenly aspect as Cynthia and in her earthly guise as Diana, as the central figure of both the major and minor narratives. A notable feature of Spenser's use of lunar imagery is that it is almost invariably associated with feminine beauty and benevolence. Cynthia is always 'faire', Isis represents 'That part of Justice which is Equity', and the extended lunar image that recurs in the *Faerie Queene* is that of a light that guides the lost and weary traveller.

George Chapman was another major Elizabethan poet to take up the moon-goddess theme, in his heavily allegorical *The Shadow of Night* (1594). This poem, which Frances Yates describes as 'the quintessence of the Cynthia cult',<sup>13</sup> is in two parts: a hymn to the night ('Hymnus in Noctem') and a hymn to Cynthia, or the moon ('Hymnus in Cynthia'). Towards the end of the first part, Chapman describes the moon rising in magical splendour from the blackness of the night in a way that combines classical allusion, the imagery of a Renaissance processional triumph, and verbal echoes of the biblical 'Song of Songs':

See now ascends, the glorious Bride of Brides,  
Nuptials, and triumphs, glittering by her sides,  
Iuno and Hymen do her traine adorne,  
Ten thousand torches round about them borne: [...]

with a brase of siluer Hynds,  
In luorie chariot, swifter than the winds,  
Is great Hyperions horned daughter drawne  
Enchantresse-like, deckt in disparent lawne,  
Cirkled with charmes, and incantations [...].<sup>14</sup>

Not all the Elizabethan poets who adopted the imagery of the moon-goddess cult achieve the impassioned melancholy of a Raleigh or the dense allusiveness of a Chapman. In the hands of a lesser poet such as Richard Barnfield, an imitator of Spenser, the allegory becomes formulaic and banal:

Thus, sacred Virgin, Muse of chastitie,  
This difference is betwixt the Moone and thee:  
Shee shines by Night; but thou by Day dost shine:  
Shee monthly changeth; thou dost nere decline:  
And as the Sunne, to her, doth lend his light,  
So hee, by thee, is onely made so bright [...].<sup>15</sup>

If a poem such as this represents the public, officially sanctioned aspect of lunar symbolism for the Elizabethans, the same iconography seems to have held

a deeper spiritual meaning for a persecuted minority of the Queen's subjects. In Roman Catholic emblem books of the period, the moon symbolises the Virgin Mary: 'Now what may this *Moon* denote and signify to us, but the glorious *Queene of Heaven?*' the Jesuit Henry Hawkins writes in his 'Discourse of the Moon' in the emblem book *Partheneia Sacra*.<sup>16</sup> Such an association between lunar symbolism and the cult of the Virgin in Roman Catholic devotional literature of the English Renaissance is interesting. Not only does it impart an explicitly religious – and a potentially politically subversive – Christian dimension to the literary usages of lunar imagery in the period, it finds a strange and surprising echo in the poetry of Sir Walter Raleigh, who, in one of the most moving of his poems to Cynthia, 'As you came from the holy land of Walsingham', links the cults of the Protestant Virgin Queen and the Virgin Mary.<sup>17</sup>

Yet Graves makes no reference to Raleigh's poetry in *The White Goddess*. This is puzzling, especially given the fact that Raleigh's 'As you came from the holy land' is an adaptation of the traditional ballad 'Holy Land of Walsingham', which Graves quotes alongside 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' in *The White Goddess* as an example of poetry that is 'directly inspired' by the Goddess.<sup>18</sup> As for Spenser, Graves makes two passing references to the poet's *View of the Present State of Ireland*, but only one to his poetry: 'Spenser's White Goddess is the Arthurian "Lady of the Lake"' (a reference here to the enchantress Nimue, who appears as a very minor character in Book II of the *Faerie Queene*).<sup>19</sup> Of Chapman and *The Shadow of Night*, Graves makes no mention. However, while he may not discuss actual examples of the poetry of the cult of Elizabeth as moon-goddess, he does briefly acknowledge its existence:

Queen Elizabeth [...] was popularly regarded as a sort of deity: poets not only made her their Muse but gave her titles – Phoebe, Virginia, Gloriana – which identified her with the Moon-goddess, and the extraordinary hold that she gained on the affections of her subjects was largely due to this cult.<sup>20</sup>

Shakespeare 'knew and feared' the White Goddess, Graves tells us. But, he goes on:

One must not be misled by the extraordinary mythographic jumble in his *Midsummer Night's Dream*, where Theseus appears as a witty Elizabethan gallant [...] and, most monstrous of all, the Wild Ass Set-Dionysus and the star-diademed Queen of Heaven as ass-eared Bottom and tinselled Titania.<sup>22</sup>

In his apparent insistence on reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595) as a religio-mythic drama shrunk like a mystery play to the level of popular entertainment, Graves seems oddly insensitive to the fact that the play, more than any other of Shakespeare's, is saturated with the imagery of the moon and its goddess, Diana-Cynthia. It is a commonplace that the influence and presence

of the moon are to be felt throughout *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, from Theseus's opening lines to Puck's closing speech. The word 'moon' occurs twenty-eight times – more than three times more often than in any other of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the play's lunar imagery operates at every dramatic level – from the cosmic (Diana, goddess of chastity) to the comic (Moonshine and his lantern). Shakespeare, too, Frances Yates has shown, assimilates the imagery of the cult of Elizabeth into his play:

Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took  
 At a fair vestal, throned by the west,  
 And loos'd his love-shaft smartly from his bow  
 As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.  
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft  
 Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon;  
 And the imperial votress passed on,  
 In maiden meditation, fancy free.

II. i. 157–64<sup>24</sup>

The 'fair vestal, throned by the west' is Elizabeth, represented here as Vestal Virgin and the central figure in a Petrarchan 'triumph of chastity'.<sup>25</sup> The theme of chastity reappears often in Shakespeare's drama both during and after the lifetime of the Virgin Queen herself. Oberon's description of the 'defeat of Cupid' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is echoed, for example, in a corresponding 'defeat of Venus' described in the 'goddess' wedding masque of *The Tempest* (1611).<sup>26</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that Diana, goddess of chastity, should be the most prominent of the classical goddesses in Shakespeare's plays. Two of his female characters (Aemilia and Thaisa) are her priestesses, while another (Titania) is based on her; one play, *The Comedy of Errors* (1594) is set in her cult-centre, Ephesus; and 'Celestial Dian, goddess argentine' presides over the action of *Pericles* (1608). All told, the goddess is named more than forty times in the plays – twice as often as her nearest rival, Venus, goddess of love.<sup>27</sup>

Why does Graves ignore, or so casually dismiss, the poetry of the cult of Elizabeth in *The White Goddess*? He tells us that he was certainly aware of it. A possible answer, I suggest, lies in a combination of two factors. First, by relying on an anonymous ballad such as 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' to support his claim of an underground 'tradition' of White Goddess worship surviving into the seventeenth century, Graves can successfully evade the issue of source-criticism.<sup>28</sup> In the case of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Chapman, scholarship has identified the literary sources of their moon-goddess imagery – Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Shakespeare and Spenser); a Renaissance mythological dictionary, Natali Conti's *Mythologiae* (Chapman). The second, and perhaps the decisive factor for Graves, is that his White Goddess is *not* the regal and chaste figure of Elizabeth–Diana who – despite Raleigh's complaints of her cruelty – is essen-

tially benign. Graves's White Goddess is the darker side of the moon. And it is significant that, after dismissing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a sentence, he should turn in *The White Goddess* to Shakespeare's more 'sincere' portrayal of the Goddess as Hecate, goddess of the witches in *Macbeth*, the 'magnificent and wanton' Cleopatra, and the 'damn'd witch' Sycorax of *The Tempest*.<sup>29</sup>

In questioning Graves's interpretation of 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' and looking beyond the ballad for evidence of 'primitive moon-worship' in the poetry of the same period, a curious irony emerges. For not only was such poetry being written by English poets, the corpus of verse that can quite legitimately be described as moon-goddess poetry is actually much larger than Graves himself would apparently have us believe. While other poems – Raleigh's 'Prais'd be Diana's fair and harmless light', Chapman's 'Hymnus in Cynthiam' – may have stronger claims than 'Tom o' Bedlam's Song' to be Graves's 'perfect compendium' of moon-goddess worship, the connection he makes between the religious rituals of pagan antiquity and English Renaissance poetry is far less fanciful than it may at first appear. Indeed, it could be argued that the poetry of the cult of Queen Elizabeth as moon-goddess – the verse of Sir Walter Raleigh, Edmund Spenser, and George Chapman – constitutes an unwritten chapter of *The White Goddess*.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

1. Jack Lindsay, *Fanfrolico and After* (London: The Bodley Head, 1962), p. 78.
2. *Loving Mad Tom: Bedlamite Verses of the XVI and XVIIth Centuries* (London: Franfrolico Press, 1927):

### TOM O' BEDLAM'S SONG

From the hag and hungry goblin  
That into rags would rend ye,  
The spirit that stands by the naked man  
In the Book of Moons defend ye,  
That of your five sound senses  
You never be forsaken  
Nor wander from yourselves, with Tom,  
Abroad to beg your bacon.  
While I do sing 'Any food, any feeding,  
Feeding, drink or clothing?'  
Come dame or maid, be not afraid:  
Poor Tom will injure nothing.

Of thirty bare years have I  
 Twice twenty been enraged,  
 And of forty been three times fifteen  
 In durance soundly caged,  
 On the lordly lofts of Bedlam  
 With stubble soft and dainty,  
 Brave bracelets strong, sweet whips ding dong,  
 And wholesome hunger plenty.  
 And now I sing, etc.

A thought I took for Maudline  
 In a cruse of cockle pottage:  
 With a thing thus tall – God bless you all! –  
 I befell into this dotage.  
 I've slept not since the Conquest,  
 Ere then I never waked  
 Till the roguish fay of love where I lay  
 Me found and stripped me naked.  
 And now I sing, etc.

When I short have shorn my sow's-face  
 And snigged my hairy barrel  
 At an oaken inn I 'pound my skin  
 In a suit of gilt apparel.  
 The Moon's my constant mistress  
 And the lovely owl my marrow.  
 The flaming drake and the night-crow make  
 Me music to my sorrow.  
 While I do sing, etc.

The palsy plague my pulses  
 If I prig your pigs or pullen,  
 Your culvers take, or matchless make  
 Your Chanty-clear or Solan!  
 When I want provant, with Humphry  
 I sup, and when benighted  
 I repose in Paul's with waking souls  
 Yet never am affrighted.  
 But I do sing, etc.



I know more than Apollo,  
 For oft when he lies sleeping  
 I see the stars at bloody wars  
 And the wounded welkin weeping,  
 The Moon embrace her shepherd  
 And the Queen of Love her warrior,  
 When the first doth horn the Star of the Morn  
 And the next, the Heavenly Farrier.  
 While I do sing, etc.

The gipsies, Snap and Pedro,  
 Are none of Tom's camradoes;  
 The punk I scorn and the cut-purse sworn  
 And the roaring-boy's bravadoes:  
 The meek, the white, the gentle  
 Me handle, touch and spare not,  
 But those that cross Tom Rhinoceros  
 Do what the Panther dare not.  
 Though I do sing, etc.

With an host of furious fancies  
 Whereof I am commander,  
 With a burning spear and a horse of air  
 To the wilderness I wander.  
 By a knight of ghosts and shadows  
 I summoned am to tourney,  
 Ten leagues beyond the wide world's end –  
 Methinks it is no journey.  
 Yet will I sing, etc.

I'll bark against the Dog-Star,  
 I'll crow away the morning,  
 I'll chase the Moon till it be noon  
 And make her leave her horning,  
 But I'll find merry mad Maudline,  
 And seek whate'er betides her,  
 And I will love beneath or above  
 The dirty earth that hides her.  
 Till then I sing, etc.

3. Graves to Alan Hodge, 13 July 1943, in Paul O'Prey (ed.), *In Broken Images: Selected Letters of Robert Graves, 1914–1946* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 315–16.

4. *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber, 1948; fourth edition, 1961), p. 433.
5. 'The Common Asphodel', in *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry, 1922–1949* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. 327. Graves's Loving Mad Tom essay is also reprinted in Paul O'Prey (ed.), *Robert Graves: Collected Writings on Poetry* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995).
6. Duncan Salkeld, *Madness and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 25–26. Other ballads include 'Mad Maudlin' and 'Bess of Bedlam', in W. H. Logan (ed.), *A Pedlar's Pack of Ballads and Songs* (Edinburgh: William Paterson, 1869), pp. 172–88, and 'Old Tom of Bedlam', in Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, vol. II* (London, 1765; reprinted London: Routledge/Thoemneses Press, 1996), pp. 344–46.
7. Several meanings are present: as verb – 'to cuckold' (and possibly 'to gore') – and as noun – rhinoceros horn, drinking horn, the 'horns' of the moon. 'Horn' in the sense of 'an erection' certainly seems to be present ('With a thing thus tall – God bless you all!'), but according to the OED the word did not acquire this meaning until the eighteenth century.
8. Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), p. 48; Frances Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 76.
9. Virgil, *Aeneid*, I. 498–500.
10. 'Prais'd be Diana's fair and harmless light', in *Selected Writings*, ed. Gerald Hammond (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986).
11. Yates, *Astraea*, p. 216 and *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 1979), p. 206. The Raleigh portrait appears, for example, as the cover illustration to the Penguin *Selected Writings*.
12. 'Letter to Sir Walter Raleigh', in *The Faerie Queene*, vol. I (London: Scolar Press, 1976), p. 593.
13. Yates, *Astraea*, p. 76.
14. 'Hymnus in Noctem', lines 384–96, in *The Poems of George Chapman*, ed. Phyllis Brooks Bartlett (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962).
15. 'Cynthia' (1595), lines 172–77, in *Richard Barnfield: The Complete Poems*, ed. George Klawitter (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1990).
16. Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1948), p. 190.
17. Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge, Kent: D. S. Brewer, 1980), pp. 21–22.
18. *The White Goddess*, p. 434.
19. *The White Goddess*, p. 439.
20. *The White Goddess*, p. 406.

21. In Graves's Goddess novel *Seven Days in New Crete* (London: Cassell, 1949) a New Cretan remarks that Shakespeare " [...] climbed painfully by night up a broken stair lighted only by the Goddess's cruel smile; he loved her, though against his will" (p. 82).
22. *The White Goddess*, p. 426.
23. Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), pp. 259–60.
24. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Harold F. Brooks (London: Methuen, 1979).
25. *Occult Philosophy*, p. 149; *Astraea*, p. 77.
26. *The Tempest*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Methuen, 1954), IV. i. 87–101.
27. *Pericles*, V. i. 238–49, ed. F. D. Hoeniger (London: Methuen, 1969). The 'rankings' of the principal classical goddesses in the plays are: Diana–Cynthia (42), Venus (21), Juno (19), Hecate (7), Ceres (4), Minerva (2). Not all Shakespeare's allusions to the moon-goddess cult of the 1590s are as conventional and eulogistic as Oberon's speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *Henry IV Part I* (1597), the dramatist gives its symbolism a subversive comic twist when, apropos the attractions of a life of crime, Falstaff says to Prince Hal:

Marry, then, sweet wag, when thou art king, let not us that are squires of the night's body be called thieves of the day's beauty: let us be Diana's foresters, gentlemen of the shade, minions of the moon; and let men say, we be men of good government, being governed as the sea is, by our noble and chaste mistress the moon, under whose countenance we steal. (*Henry IV Part I*, I. ii)

28. If such a tradition *did* exist, perhaps it should be looked for not, as Graves does, in the so-called 'witch-cult' (*The White Goddess*, pp. 386, 407), but in Renaissance Neoplatonism: Raleigh, Spenser, and Chapman each show strong Neoplatonic influences in their poetry.
29. *The White Goddess*, p. 426.
30. One of Graves's own White Goddess authors, the nineteenth-century English rural labourer-poet John Clare, made a similar observation about Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets*. Clare noted in his journal in 1824:

I never take up Johnsons lives but I regret his beginning at the wrong end first & leaving out those beautiful minstrels of Elizabeth – had he forgot that there had been such poets as Spenser Drayton Suckling &c &c but it was the booksellers judgment that employd his pen & we know by experience that most of their judgments lie in their pockets – so the Poets of Elizabeth are still left in cobwebs & mystery. (John Clare, journal entry for October 10, 1824, in *The Journal, Essays, The Journey from Essex*, ed. Anne Tibble (Manchester: Carcanet, 1980), p. 41.)