

Riding-Graves: The Meaning of Collaboration

Carla Billitteri

University of Maine, Orono, USA

There are three distinct phases in the Riding-Graves collaboration. A first phase of mutual support and enhancement of common beliefs. A second phase of programmatic advancement of these common beliefs. In this phase adjustments have to be made, at the cost of sacrificing individual differences. These adjustments lead to a third phase of complete fusion that carries a loss of individual identities. The meaning of collaboration changes accordingly from phase to phase, arriving at a transformation of meaning so radical that it is also the end of collaboration *tout court*.

In the first and most productive years of their literary partnership, from 1927 to 1929, the Riding-Graves collaboration revolved around a set of mutual interests: the need to promote the unremitting difficulty and uncompromising difference of modernist poetry (and modernist art in general); and the need to assert the intellectual independence of the modernist writer from any political doctrine, societal expectation, or ideological restriction. These interests were quite common amongst modernist writers. Like many other modernists, Riding and Graves understood that the successful achievement of their goals hinged on one single task: educating the plain reader in the 'vigorous imaginative efforts' that modernist poetry demands.¹

This was a task that both Riding and Graves envisioned as onerous and contingent, for the plain reader was not only to be made to adjust to the demands of the new poetry, he had to adjust merely so as not to depart from the author's intended meanings. Thus, for example, in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* we are instructed that '[t]he crux of the whole question of the intelligibility of "difficult" poetry' is that the poet's poems must '*be understood as he meant them to be, or understood not at all*'.² The fear of losing their authorial control over the reader, the preoccupation with the very possibility of being exposed to 'inferior critical interpretations,' informs the most belligerent public edge of Riding's and Graves's joint poetic statements, and functions as their private cementing bond.³ Against the onslaught of simple-mindedness, laziness and ingrained middlebrow habits that characterize 'the plain reader' (as well as any manifestation of conservative literary criticism), Riding and Graves defend their aesthetic and poetic interests with pugnacity and at times with unabashed aggressiveness, on the sharp premises of 'dealing [...] with a modernism with [...] no feelings of obligation to the plain reader', a modernism solely 'undertaken [...] in the interest of poetry'.⁴ In order to safeguard such interest, Riding and Graves champion a form of poetry tightly constructed and readily armed as a perfectly oiled war machine, '*tactically disposed to resist critical attacks*'. They write:

[W]hile there is no way of being absolutely sure that the steps taken in

unravelling the poem are the same as those involved in inventing the poem, the strength of such poem is proved by [...] the extent to which it is tactically disposed to resist critical attacks. As long as the poem is so disposed, it justifies itself.⁵

A perfect poem cannot be criticized, nor actually 'read', especially if the act of reading departs from the path established by the authorial intention.

The aesthetic war that Riding and Graves waged against the plain reader (and the plain critic) was at the centre of Graves's reflections long before he met Riding. Graves's first sustained effort in critical prose, *On English Poetry* (1922), is an unending sequence of convincing rationalizations of the necessity of using trickery when dealing with the reader, who is treated as a stubborn enemy, to be soothed, tamed and eventually subjugated. These are the contents of a fantasy piece titled 'The Parable of Mr. Poeta and Mr. Lector', placed at the very heart of the book. In this story, the conflict with the reader finds a happy resolution only when the reader is left with 'no critical weapons at his command', forced to 'follow the course which the poet has mapped out for him'.⁶ This call for the complete subordination of the reader to the writer is not a passing fantasy but a recurrent concern in Graves's criticism. In fact, as Graves proposes in a serious (if only slightly humorous) essay meant to expose the danger of using facile rhymes in poetry,

The reader must be made to surrender himself completely to the poet, as to his guide in a strange country; he must never be allowed to run ahead and say 'Hurry up, sir, I know this part of the country as well as you [...] I see [...] "dancing" and "glancing" in the distance'.

At the basis of Graves's aesthetic of reading as guided passivity, lies a nihilist and rather cynical ethical stance, one that Graves is not afraid to address with a bold mixture of openness and ingenuity. Art, he argues, 'is not moral', and morality is in itself a 'fiction' of civilization, a fiction artists see through. Yet the modern artist should not openly 'antagonize' his readers (this is the mistake of the 'Da-da-ists', Graves argues) because 'there is little hope of playing the confidence-trick on an enemy'.⁸ Art is dissimulation, albeit an honest one. No matter what the costs are, the enemy-reader 'must be made to surrender himself completely to the poet'. *À la guerre comme à la guerre*, as the French would say.

In 1925, Graves's sense of being a poet on a military campaign for the higher reaches of art is intensified by the publication of 'A Prophecy or a Plea', an article by Laura Riding published under the full name of 'Laura Riding Gottschalk' in the American literary magazine *The Reviewer*.⁹ In her article, Riding announces that the times are ready for the advent of a new race of poets, 'men and women possessed of a passion they can communicate to life'. These

new poets, in Riding's prophetic Whitmanian vistas, will be champions of a new poetry of 'vigorous idealism', an idealism that heroically defies reality. Thus, in Riding's words, the new poets 'will put their hands upon the mysterious contour of life not to force meaning out of it [...] but press meaning upon it, outstare the stony countenance of it, make it flush with their own colors.'¹⁰ Graves's response is immediate. In 1926, he publishes with the Hogarth Press *Another Future of Poetry*, an inspired, quirky pamphlet dedicated to 'L. R. G.' Here Graves defends the poet's right to create his own 'relative' poetic universe, a space of protean 'fantasia' where grammar 'becomes frayed and snaps', rhythm expands and 'evol[ves] [...] as complex and free as instrumental music'.¹¹ Such complete and unashamed freedom to affirm one's reality is, not surprisingly, the poet's prerogative, while the reader is expected to follow the new paths of linguistic meaning opened by the poet. Yet, there is no forcing here, no struggle of wills, because the Prometheus-poet is so 'possessed of a passion' (to recall Riding's words) as to be able to control all 'hidden or forgotten associations of words' and preclude the possibility of poor interpretation. Ultimately, however, the reader's understanding does not even matter, for poetry is an affair of passionate minds (Riding's vision of a 'new race of men and women') and, Graves concludes, it 'cannot be understood except by those minds in the same condition of heightened sensibility'.

The collaboration between Riding and Graves is thus born, propelled by the emancipatory swagger of Riding's 'vigorous idealism'. Yet if we pay close attention to Riding's words in 'A Prophecy or a Plea' and then to Graves's statements in his *Another Future of Poetry*, we realize that Riding envisioned poetry as a moment of forceful and active intervention in the field of reality, whereas Graves envisioned poetry as a sheltered refuge of 'heightened sensibilities'. Thus, for instance, Riding describes this new race of poets as rough-edged stalwart beings, 'endowed with the ruthlessness of a pioneer ... muscular ... equipped not merely for static ecstasy or despair but for a progress into an unexplored terrain' – a terrain where Riding grants poets the freedom of being 'rude as [...] violator[s] ... [who] must advance alone'.¹³ By contrast, Graves's poets are inspired tricksters, free sensual spirits, happy to escape in their private fantasies. It should also be noticed that Graves quotes Riding at length, but selectively. For instance, he leaves outside the most aggressive traits of her piece. Yet those passages are perhaps the most revealing of the ideological brutality of Riding's extreme idealism, a fact well exemplified in her imagery of the pioneer experience of modernist writers. It is only because Graves does not consider the all-consuming call of Riding's pioneer modernism that he is able to present 'A Prophecy or a Plea' to British readers as a manifesto of 'new poetic relativity'. Interestingly, Graves understands 'relativity' in a liberal sense, as an indication that modernist poetry can peacefully cohabit with more conservative forms of poetic expression – in particular, Graves specifies, with the turn-of-the-century realist aesthetic of a poetry based on the truthful rendi-

tion of received experience. Thus, Graves selects from Laura Riding's article a single passage that counterposes 'the elder poets of England and America [...] still worshipping that old god experience' to the new poet, bravely facing reality in a spiritual duel. Thus Riding: 'Confronted by a terrifying, absorbing, fascinating universe, he [the new poet] does not cry out: "how big, how terrifying, how fascinating!" and permits [*sic*] himself to be overcome by it, but answer[s] it, since this universe, a thing apart, can be answered in no other way, atom for atom, in a recreated universe of his own, a universe defiantly intelligible'.¹⁴ We should also note that the object of Riding's polemic is the exclamatory expressivity of 'sentimental' poetry – not so much 'realist' poetry per se. Sentimentality, for Riding, translates a certain lack of rational understanding, which in turn Riding considers as a lapse in moral strength. This is why her accent falls on the heroism and the 'defiant intelligibility' of the new poets. By contrast, Graves sees in Riding's article the legitimization of an organicist (and, again, borderline anarchist) poetics of form, completely illegible because devoid of any 'architectural preconception', moral preoccupations, and destined to an 'organic growth'.¹⁵ Indeed, there is a sensible, yet not recognized (or if recognized, not acknowledged) difference between Riding's and Graves's programmes, a difference indicative of the precarious foundations upon which this collaboration rested. I will return to this point.

Riding brings to her collaboration with Graves a radical diffidence about the sensorial aspects of poetic language, a diffidence that permeated her criticism as well as her poetry. In her first book of poetics written on her own, *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (1928), Riding claims that poetry rushes through language like a swift mercurial material that 'quickens' in language the destruction of language. Poetry systematically 'hammer[s] away' the superfluous, sensorial strata of sense – what Riding calls the 'inert mass' of plain language – until everything is left 'as pure and bare as possible after [...] [this] operation'. Until, Riding concludes, 'each word demonstrates its necessity', that is, its inner core of necessary meaning.¹⁶ Riding's destructive approach to poetry is built upon her awareness of the conflict between the semantic and sensorial strata of poetic expression, as well as on her conviction that the truth of the semantic level (a level Riding identifies with the literal – a slippage revelatory of Riding's logical neo-positivism), ought to be preserved at any cost, even at the cost of destroying the sensorial and figurative level of language. The logical development of Riding's theoretical premises will eventually determine, in 1941, her poetic silence.

Back in 1928, Riding's ideas echoed and reinforced Graves's territorial concerns about the final ownership of the meaning of the poem, concerns, as we recall, he had eloquently articulated in his *On English Poetry*, in 1922. But this moment of mutual agreement and intellectual support came at a cost for Graves, for Riding's foundational commitment to the destructive 'operation' of poetry silenced Graves's fascination as a critic with the sensual strata of lan-

guage, or (as he preferred to put it) with the hypnotic and intoxicating 'virtues' of poetic language.

This fascination was central to Graves's reflection on the very act of poesis. In *On English Poetry* he had speculated that poetry descends from the rituals of primitive religions, deriving its power from the incantatory, trance-like rhythms of tribal drums. Later on, in *Another Future of Poetry* (1926), he had expanded his interest and fleshed them out with an idiosyncratic mixture of psycho-linguistic and even neuro-linguistic observations. Thus he had written that 'the intrinsic virtues of poetry [...] its rhythms, rhymes, and texture have an actual toxic effect on the nervous system [...] of greater or less strength according to the level of mental functioning required [...] [spanning from] day-dreaming [...] [to] the monstrosities of trance and deep sleep'.¹⁷ Behind the rather hyperbolic expression of Graves's beliefs lay a strongly anarchic aesthetic impulse, competently restrained by his conservative understanding of the *Realpolitik* of writing poetry: his understanding of working in a medium (language) whose meanings are never entirely private – a medium that forces the poet into a position of intellectual responsibility toward the audience. Already in *On English Poetry*, Graves confessed his urge to freely experiment with language and complained that such a proposition is altogether not viable to the poet:

One of the most embarrassing limitations of poetry is that the language you use is not your own to do entirely what you like with. [...] It is intolerable to feel so bound compared with the freedom of a musician or a sculptor; [...] the poet cannot escape into mere rhythmic sound; there is always the dead load of sense to drag about with him. [...] [I]n poetry everything is relevant; it is an omnibus of an art – a public omnibus.¹⁸

This passage profiles Graves's unresolved tension between his fascination with the idea of a kind of poetry-writing meant to explore the creative possibilities of the sensorial levels of language and his pragmatic understanding of poetry as a finished product with a public address and a public appeal. A sensorial poetry paradoxically set in opposition to the 'dead load of sense' carried by ordinary use of language would achieve the weightlessness of language that Graves desired, but at the cost of communication. Graves is caught in an aporia of his own making: the sensorial seduction of poetic language, once unleashed by the poet, can get out of hand and undermine the possibility of complete semantic authorial control over meaning. If indeed art is a 'public omnibus' and the poet a conductor, swaying the reader with the intoxicating power of poetry risks wreckage. Pointedly, then, Graves describes the act of writing poetry as a complex experience – a 'great mesmeric art', 'bound up' with the obsessive, rigorous 'business of controlling the association-ghosts which haunt in their millions every word of the English language'.¹⁹

Graves is openly ambivalent about this subject. To make things even more complex, he admits that the very idea of an ultimate control of sense – though postulated as necessary – is by definition beyond the individual reach of the poet because the poet has hardly any control of himself. The poetic experience, Graves argues, is a journey through schizophrenia; the poet is by constitution and inclination fragmented in a multitude of contrasting selves. What the poet presents to his readers is only a temporary approximation of meaning produced by a likewise temporary, eminently unstable co-ordination of selves. Since the poet cannot control the meaning-content of his own many selves and day-dreaming or – more importantly – induced ‘trance’ of his reader, the ‘dead load of [shared] sense’ – not to mention the ‘business’ part of the artistic experience – might be a useful (if lamentable) anchor after all. Graves, however, does not openly propose a solution of these many problematic issues he presents with a great deal of frankness.²⁰

All these insights, ambivalent self-critiques and conflicting beliefs are entirely suppressed in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, Graves’s first collaboration with Riding, for reasons of consistency and self-preservation. Every single one of Graves’s early poetic beliefs, caught as they were in a mire of controversial implications, risked reversing the compact and invincible war machine of modernist poetry into a shabby, rattling means of public transportation. Graves’s suppressed conflicts are sublimated in a newly found belief in poetry as an ‘operating theatre’ where all personal predicaments are marginal details, downright inappropriate and quaint.²¹

In defining poetry as an operating theatre, Graves is following Riding’s lead. As I’ve already discussed, in *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, Riding defined poetry as an ‘operation’ of language, and in the same book she also advanced the claim that poetry (the expression of all that is private, anti-social and ‘fundamentally unreal’), can communicate its truths only by implementing its own unreality in a display of false appearances. Thus, one of the primary scenes of poetry reading in *Anarchism Is Not Enough* takes place in a public theatre. As Riding puts it, ‘appearances do not deceive if there’s enough of them’.²² Poetry, in Riding’s views, is far more extreme and radical than anarchism: it is the literal destruction of all accepted bourgeois values. Such destruction must, however, be camouflaged, or its caustic truths would kill the audience, as Riding fantasizes in her theatre scene, hence the necessity of writing a poetry that mimes the dominant ethical and linguistic values to better subvert them. The mimicry, in other words, preserves the marketability of the poet while safekeeping his intellectual integrity. As Riding reminds us, ‘sincerity must be artificial to be really sincere’.²³ Poetry is a performance of honest appearances, a play of ‘naked masks’, as Pirandello would have had it.

Honest appearances, sincere artificiality: these paradoxical expressions point to an even more paradoxical belief in the possibility of arriving at the bare literal meaning of the poet’s words (as well as thoughts) through successive

implementations of figural meaning. This poetics strengthens the intellectual economy of the Riding-Graves collaboration, mostly by answering Graves's unresolved dialectic between the sensorial and the semantic levels of language (what Graves defined as the 'dead load of sense'). Even though in Riding's writings 'sensorial' stands in opposition to 'literal' (Graves must in fact relent in his fascination with the sensorial aspect of language), the 'literal' conveys, just as the sensorial did in Graves's early writings, the innermost core of the poet's freedom and privacy, while the figurative functions as the semantic level in Graves, mediating between the poet and the audience. The figurative is still a 'dead load', as Graves noted of the semantic, but it is unavoidable. Riding and Graves have reached the most fruitful compromise of their collaborative efforts.

This delicate balance of figurative and literal meanings is sealed in the third phase of the collaboration, in the first volume of *Epilogue*, a literary and philosophical magazine co-founded in 1935.²⁴ The title, 'Epilogue', functions as the *figura* or emblem of the literal contents of the publication; but these 'literal' contents are, in turn, figural reminders of the title of the publication in which they appear as printed matter. This play of figural meanings that implement each other in the pursuit of an ultimate literal truth, a veritable play within a play, is also represented in the front page of the magazine (see figure 1), where a white scroll reaches out toward the audience from a semi-circular front stage that is enclosed by other backdrop stages all around. The rear centre stage is occupied by a little theatre with a closed black curtain: the 'honest' representation of the complementarity of figural (public) and literal (private) meaning. The literal meaning, however, is represented as a figure of illegibility – a closed black curtain. The unreality of poetry approaches the truth of itself (its own 'epilogue') implementing the appearance of its irreality, a veritable *mise-en-abyme* of the privacy and enigmatic a-sociality of poetry-writing.

After Riding, Graves conceives this sincere artificiality as a defiant gesture that goes 'against kind', an expression he first uses to describe Laura Riding's role in his 1929 dedicatory 'Epilogue' to *Good-Bye to All That*.²⁵ A radical change has taken place: whereas the early Graves had acknowledged all sorts of faults (manipulative expediency, self-fragmentation, disintegration and even personal failure), the later Graves, the Graves in collaboration, studiously endeavours to present a composed fiction of control, openness and sincerity. The difficulty of maintaining this fiction is perhaps exemplified by Riding's response to Graves's poem 'Against Kind'. The poem was the object of Riding's stern critique on the ground of its staged sincerity. Thus, Riding wrote at the bottom of Graves's manuscript, 'I haven't gone on correcting this – because I don't think it's a sincere poem, especially as it goes on – a sort of duty-poem, its emotions not the same as *your* emotions'.²⁶ The same applies to Riding's revision of Graves's poem 'The Castle'. Where Graves had 'nightmares, nightmares', Riding penned 'not true, not true' – an evident effort at creating a

'sincere' and more controlled, less romanticized or melodramatic representation. From 1929 onward, the Riding-Graves collaboration finds a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of self-congratulatory moments in their joint program to write a new kind of poetry devoid of 'poetic ambiguity' (as we read in a 1931 Seizin Press announcement for Graves's *To Whom Else?*)²⁷ as well as in their safekeeping of poetry's 'naked mask' of sincerity, as each preface to their respective 1938 *Collected Poems* shows.²⁸

In 1930, after a series of traumatic events, the Riding-Graves collaboration enters its third phase when Riding (in a strong autobiographical piece entitled 'Obsession,' published in her collection of prose pieces *Experts Are Puzzled*) drastically redefines the meaning of the word 'collaboration'. Collaboration, Riding writes, is *de facto* a sham concept, for it implies two different people working on a single project whereas, in Riding's words, she and Graves 'have not made a compromise', they have reached the stage where they have become 'one' composite person. Thus, Riding concludes, addressing Graves, 'I shall deal gently with you, [...] I shall treat you, for all purposes [...] as myself. In this way you will gradually disappear, so gradually that I shall not miss you when you are gone, nor you yourselves'.²⁹

By the mid-1930s, with the publication of *Epilogue*, Riding justifies this new phase of her collaboration with Graves as the necessary and final consequence of poetry's meaning. 'Poetry,' writes Riding in 1935, 'is the unique standard governing likeness. [...] [T]he notion of poetry is the notion of an *implicit identity of all distinctions* in a final standard of relation'.³⁰ Through the bond of poetry, the collaboration between Laura Riding and Robert Graves has now officially become a single and 'implicit' identity, an actual fusion of selves. Thus, in contrast with the impersonal prose of *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, where Riding and Graves never made open reference to themselves, never pronominally 'appeared' on the page, Riding and Graves now speak as a 'we'.³¹ But this 'implicit identity' is, as Riding had announced in 'Obsession', that of Laura Riding herself.

In *Epilogue* the Riding-Graves fusion is made to include their friends James Reeves, Thomas Matthews, John Cullen, John Aldridge, Honor Wyatt, Gordon Glover, Harry Kemp and Alan Hodge. Thus, in the editorial 'Preliminaries' of *Epilogue I*, Riding explains the publishing conditions of the periodical:

No one should merely 'submit' material to us [...] contributions must be the result of collaborative arrangement. Our activity is collaborative, and there can be no collaboration without an adjustment of interest to a central theme. Our central theme is time-surviving truth, and a final unity of values is this truth. We welcome collaborators who will take pleasure in thus adjusting their interests [...] to [...] [this] governing standard.³²

Riding uses the word 'collaboration' quite freely in her editorial, yet 'collabora-

tion' has now become the signature of a regimented utopia of minds adjusted to a 'governing standard', expressing itself through a pervasively unifying 'we' and trained to think as one mind, in order to speak one single truth – the 'final unity of values' of poetry – against and beyond the unfolding of time and history, beyond the unfolding of time *tout court*. The intellectual community of Deyá is in all respects a monologic oligarchy ruled by Laura Riding. In fact, Riding signs all editorials and oversees (rewrites, vetoes, alters) all critical pieces, even when collaborators publish under their own name.

In keeping with Riding's master plan, the crucial difference of *Epilogue* was to reside in its programmatic staging of collective conversations engaged with the sole purpose of reaching a seamless fusion of minds, identities and thoughts. To mention but a few of these staged conversations: one on reality and poetry, another on poetry and philosophy, a third on contemporary politics. In all of them, Graves places himself on a plane of intellectual vassalage to Riding, a situation that casts a revealing light on the harmonious 'adjustment of interests' advertised by Riding in her first editorial, singularly dominated by the perfect pronominal and intellectual utopia of the 'we'. Graves's vassalage is most noticeable in 'Poems and Poets', a 'conversation on the criticism of poems' that gives Riding the opportunity to present her final thoughts on poetry – while Graves disappears in the background, only to reappear now and again with obsequious questions.³³ Interestingly enough, Riding's thoughts are not new. In fact, they are a summary of the concepts presented by both Riding and Graves in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. Graves's subordinate position seems all the more surprising for this reason.

The exchange on 'Poems and Poets' is followed by two short pieces, both by Graves, the first on 'Coleridge and Wordsworth', the second on 'Keats and Shelley'. The theoretical framework of both these pieces originates from Riding, whose permission and approval Graves requests toward the end of 'Poems and Poets' with the following words:

What you say about Keats and Shelley provides a very useful clue to the peculiar resemblances and oppositions between them; I should like, when you have finished this conversation, to present a study of them according to these characterizations of yours. And I should also like to make a similar study of Coleridge and Wordsworth. What clue, within the kind of meanings you have been setting out here, would you suggest for them?³⁴

Thus, in *Epilogue*, the collaboration between Riding and Graves becomes a rehearsal of intellectual ventriloquism. Let me add, in passing, that it is not a pretty sight. In both his pieces, Graves deflects the authority of his argument to Riding, while Riding herself intervenes with six lengthy footnotes that discuss the philosophical and theoretical complexities underlying Graves's writing. It is as if Graves is willingly executing orders, constructing, with each essay, a

critical edifice he has not designed. The dialogue between Graves's text and Riding's footnotes is so blatantly asymmetrical as to give the impression that Graves is entirely blind to the implications of his own writing and in need of constant guidance. But we should not forget that Graves's helplessness is a carefully orchestrated fiction, constructed so as to make sure that the reader will find Riding's footnotes completely justified. These footnotes and all other tributes to Riding's thinking will in fact disappear in Graves's later reprints of these articles, a tangible sign of Graves's intellectual re-enfranchisement.³⁵

Despite his show of respect and his compliant behaviour, Graves was not completely amused by the role he was expected to play. In fact, in the corpus of his writing between 1929 (the year marked by the birth of the 'operating theatre' of poetry) and 1936 (the last year of collaborative writing), a number of texts point to Graves's dissatisfaction with the altered meaning of his collaboration with Riding. I want to draw attention to two of these instances: the poem 'This What-I-Mean,' and the short prose piece 'Neo-Georgian Eternity'.³⁶

'This What-I-Mean' is a direct, elegant and quite compelling poem apparently written in 1929. Although, as Dunstan Ward suggests, Graves brought the manuscript to its final stage, he never published it in his lifetime.³⁷ 'Neo-Georgian Eternity,' a critique of E. M. Forster's collection of short stories *The Eternal Moment*, was published in the second volume of *Epilogue* (1936) under the heading 'Marginal Themes,' but never republished in Graves's subsequent collections of prose. Both the poem and the prose piece were, for lack of a better word, suppressed, just as Graves suppressed his fascination with the intoxicating 'virtues' of poetry. Suppression, as I suggested earlier, is a crucial component in the economy of staging. In this particular case, however, it signals the presence of intensely private occasions that must be wiped away from the 'operating theatre' of poetry: occasions of self-doubt, vulnerability, dissent. Both 'This What-I-Mean' and 'Neo-Georgian Eternity' are in fact coded affirmations of Graves's anarchist-existentialist philosophy, a philosophy that did not match Riding's post-1930 credo of complete unity in collaboration, nor the collectivist agenda of *Epilogue*.

'Neo-Georgian Eternity,' a small masterpiece of denial and mordant irony, brims with Graves's longing for a different kind of utopian community, one ruled by a state of 'happy individualist disorganization' – an acrostic which humorously reads: H.I.D. In this happy community, 'perfect social co-ordination [is regarded as] [...] a false goal,' whereas true (that is: creative) co-ordination is shown to be a radical 'lack of co-ordination'.³⁸ Needless to say, the H.I.D. is the specular inversion of the strictly organized and co-ordinated intellectual community of Deyá, where nothing short of a sublation of individuality was expected. Graves's examination of the 'eternal moment' (of E. M. Forster's title) yields a more abrasive (and again coded) irony. The 'eternal moment', Graves writes, is 'the individual moment', thrilling and 'fascinating', a moment of *jouissance* drastically opposed to the 'final moment', utterly 'dull and destructive',

the prerogative of priests and other oppressive and narrow-minded characters.³⁹ Of course, the very conception of *Epilogue*, Riding's brainchild, was a grand celebration of final values, final thoughts and final moments.

'This What-I-Mean' offers a more stringent version of the same coded dissent. The poem opens as a meditation on the sterility of logical deduction in poetry-writing (stringent logic was a theme dear to Riding) and ends with the stoic self-portrait of an 'I' that believes in the possibility of actualizing a neighbourliness of being (a 'closeness') that does not rely on thoughts of finality and completion, but on uncertainties. More importantly, this 'closeness' does not bring about any loss of identity, rather it 'loosens everything up', it creates independence. Thus the last stanza reads:

This what-I-mean is searching out the gap
Under all closeness and improving on it
And the new gaps above and every which way,
Gradually loosening everything up
So nothing sticks to anything but itself –
A world of rice cooked Indian fashion
To be eaten with whatever sauce we please.⁴⁰

Not exactly what Riding had in mind.

The collaboration between Riding and Graves originated in private acts of choice and judgement. Judgement, Riding argues in *Epilogue* (with Graves's silent consent), is 'the force of interest with which the pole of identity is magnetized'.⁴¹ Pointed words, describing the birth of this collaboration, its basic strength or attraction, its final transformation. 'Tis pity the judgement was mutually mistaken. The open dissent that Graves manifests in both these suppressed pieces shows that the Riding-Graves collaboration – carefully staged as it was – was founded on a bilateral misattribution of traits and motifs. Neither really understood what the other wanted to achieve. Such misapprehensions were in place from the very beginning.

In 1924, Graves thought Riding was a 'lefty', or at least a libertarian. In his *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry* (1924) Graves reprints Riding's poem 'The Quids' (a poem he greatly admired) and without much critical work affirms that it belong to the 'barrel top' of left-wing modernist poetry.⁴² But in all actuality she was not a 'lefty', let alone a libertarian thinker: she was a messianic (or 'evangelic', as Riding herself conceded in 1936 and again in 1970) intellectual – in other words, a priest under modernist cover.⁴³

Riding, on the other hand, thought Graves belonged to her prophesied 'new race' of poets, and that (therefore) he would happily sacrifice his individuality in order to achieve complete unity in the promised transcendent totality of poetry. Or perhaps she simply misjudged the pliability of his nature. In any event,

as she remarked in a private correspondence in 1969, she was quite disappointed. In the end, 'she was not flattered by the suggestion that she influenced Graves' and expressed her regrets for having 'influenced him so little'.⁴⁴

Riding was, after all, correct. That very same year the *Paris Review* published a long interview with Graves where he rephrased, almost word-by-word, his poetics of trance and intoxication of the pre-Riding's years. Thus, he affirmed, dream and poetry are the 'same thing', all part of the seventh level of sleep. That is, all part of the poetic trance: 'Sleep has seven levels, topmost of which is the poetic trance – in it you still have access to conscious thought while keeping in touch with dream [...]. [N]o poem is worth anything unless it starts from a poetic trance, out of which you can be wakened by interruption as from a dream. In fact, it is the same thing.' Those who rely heavily on the workings of logic do not – can not – experience poetic trance because they never sleep. Graves explains: 'Logic works at a very high level in consciousness. The academic never goes to sleep logically, he always stays awake. By doing so, he deprives himself of sleep. And he misses the whole thing, you see.'⁴⁵

Graves's return to his early poetic pronouncements is not simply a matter of sentimental attachment. His aim is, once again, covertly polemical. The division between the poet (who sleeps) and the non-poet (logician or academic who cannot sleep) echoes, in a carnivalesque reversal, Laura Riding's last editorial intervention for *Epilogue*, titled 'The End of the Word and After'. Written at the edge of the 'Next Great War' (a historical circumstance that in *Epilogue* both Riding and Graves treat as an unwelcome disruption of the publishing schedule), this editorial evolves around the idea that humanity sleeps, whereas, by contrast, the poets (or collaborators) of *Epilogue* have consciously 'reached a degree of full and sustained wakefulness', a superior and complete form of aesthetic and political responsibility. Riding specifies:

[B]y poets we mean those of us who are fully, constantly awake, in free possession of our own existence, of existence. [...] Our bodies may sleep [...] but our minds do not, cannot. [...] Everyone is now irrevocably wide awake, most of us dislike the sensation and reject the responsibility: most of us are behaving quite badly. But bad behaviour does not last. [...] We are now wide awake – or we are not.⁴⁶

In 1969, when Graves returns to his poetics of sleep and dreaming, he sends a clear signal of definitive dissent to Riding. Riding had stated, 'We are now wide awake – or we are not'. By choosing the side of sleep over wakefulness, Graves dissolves again, after thirty years, the pronominal collaboration with Riding. He is not 'wide awake,' therefore he is not a 'we' but an 'I' enjoying the creative side of his 'bad behaviour' – or, in Graves's own words, 'searching out the gap / Under all closeness and improving on it'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Dr. Robert J. Bertholf for the invitation to speak at the 'Robert Graves in America' conference of June 2000, and for his kind advice, mentorship and assistance. Thanks also to Michael Basinski and the staff of the Poetry/Rare Books Collection of SUNY-Buffalo for help in providing essential materials. A special thanks to Dunstan Ward. This paper continues a delightful conversation we began in Manchester in 1998.

NOTES

1. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1927), 10.
2. Riding and Graves, *Survey*, 90, emphasis in original.
3. Riding and Graves, *Survey*, 25.
4. Riding and Graves, *Survey*, 12.
5. Riding and Graves, *Survey*, 26.
6. Robert Graves, *On English Poetry* (New York: Knopf, 1922), 30.
7. Graves, *On English Poetry*, 91, emphasis added ('An Awkward Fellow Called Ariphrades').
8. Graves, *On English Poetry*, 95 ('The Moral Question').
9. Laura Riding was born Laura Reichenenthal and changed her name to 'Laura Riding Gottschalk' after her first marriage to Louis Gottschalk, because she perceived 'Laura Reichenenthal Gottschalk' as too 'unwieldy.' With this new name she made her official entry into the poetry world in the early 1920s, publishing sporadically in leading literary magazines. In 1924 she divorced her husband, but it was not until 1927 that she assumed the authorial name of 'Laura Riding'. In her prose writing of the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s she also used a variety of pseudonyms, for example 'Madaleine Vara', 'Barbara Rich', 'Lilith Outcome', and 'Lilian Reiter'. As Joyce Piell Wexler reasonably speculates, these pseudonyms were adopted for minor publications Riding 'did not want to be associated with her poetry'. Finally, in 1941, following her marriage to Schuyler B. Jackson, she changed her name to 'Laura (Riding) Jackson' and asked that this name be used even when discussing books or poems that were originally published under different names. Such an anachronistic use of 'Jackson' makes sense when discussing the early works in the context of her entire career, but a different approach is required when discussing the collaboration with Graves. Since Riding's marriage to Jackson antedates the conclusion of her working relationship with Graves, to speak of a 'Jackson-Graves' or a '(Riding) Jackson-Graves' collaboration is not only confusing, but inaccurate. For a discussion of Laura (Riding) Jackson's names and literary pseudonyms, see Joyce Piell Wexler, 'Introduction', *Laura Riding, a Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), xv, xx.
10. Laura Riding Gottschalk, 'A Prophecy or a Plea', *The Reviewer*, 5 (April 1925): 4.

11. Robert Graves, *Another Future of Poetry* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926), 31.
12. Graves, *Another Future of Poetry*, 26.
13. Gottschalk, 'A Prophecy or a Plea', 6, emphasis added.
14. Gottschalk, 'A Prophecy or a Plea', passage cited in Robert Graves, *Another Future of Poetry*, 31.
15. Graves, *Another Future of Poetry*, 32.
16. Laura Riding, *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), 117–8. The University of California Press republished *Anarchism Is Not Enough* in 2001, edited with an introduction by Lisa Samuels. The reprint keeps the same pagination as the 1928 edition. For a fine discussion of poetry as the rebellion in language against language, see Laura Riding's 'The Quids', published in *The Poems of Laura Riding* (New York: Persea, 1980), 41.
17. Graves, *On English Poetry*, 20 ('Poetry and Primitive Magic'); *Another Future of Poetry*, 25.
18. Graves, *On English Poetry*, 69–70 ('Limitations'), emphasis in original.
19. Graves, *On English Poetry*, 71 ('The Naughty Boy').
20. The study of the poet's psychological profile as schizophrenic runs throughout Robert Graves's *On English Poetry* as well as his *Poetic Unreason and Other Studies* (New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1968). First published in 1925, and conceived as a sequel to *On English Poetry*, *Poetic Unreason* is a persistent exploration of the topics of madness and creativity, the sensorial delirium caused by various forms of artistic expression, and the relationship between illogicity and poetic genius.
21. See the short piece '– Ess', written in 1929 and reprinted in Graves's collection of miscellaneous prose, *Occupation: Writer* (New York: Creative Age Press, 1950), 115–17.
22. Riding, *Anarchism Is Not Enough*, 17.
23. Laura Riding, *Experts Are Puzzled* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), 133–34.
24. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *Epilogue: A Critical Summary* (Deyá: Seizin Press, 1935–37). Mark Jacobs has edited a selection of *Essays from 'Epilogue' 1935–1937* (Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 2001). References to *Epilogue* in the present paper are to the original Seizin Press volumes.
25. Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1930), 427.
26. Robert Graves, *Complete Poems*, Volume 2, edited by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 1997), 276.
27. Graves, *Complete Poems*, Volume 2, 289.
28. Laura Riding, 'To the Reader', *Collected Poems* (London: Cassell, 1938), xv–xxvii; Robert Graves, 'Foreword', *Collected Poems* (London: Cassell, 1938), xiii–xxiv. For a critical reading of Laura Riding's determinant contribution to Graves's 1938 'Foreword', see Dunstan Ward's editorial notes in Graves, *Complete Poems*, Volume 2, 298–309.
29. Riding, *Experts Are Puzzled*, 98, 102.
30. Laura Riding, 'Poems and Poets', *Epilogue I* (Autumn 1935): 152, emphasis added.

31. Riding and Graves are, moreover, united behind the mask of a shared fictional middle identity, that of 'Madeleine Vara', a pseudonym whose final authorial attribution became a *rerum belli* in the 1950s, after Graves republished the essay 'Nietzsche' under his own name, provoking Riding's indignation. Riding claimed that she was the real Vara, not Graves, and therefore the piece had been stolen from her.
32. Laura Riding, 'Preliminaries', *Epilogue I*: 4. This community of 'collaborators' is fictionalized in Riding's 1935 'Preface' to her *Progress of Stories* where Riding envisions a community of friends having a conversation and slowly merging their minds into one. *Progress of Stories* was first published by the Seizin Press (Deyá, Majorca, 1935), republished by the Dial Press (London, 1982). The first American publication was by Persea Books (New York, 1994).
33. Laura Riding, 'Poems and Poets', *Epilogue I*: 144–56.
34. Riding, 'Poems and Poets', *Epilogue I*: 155.
35. Robert Graves reprinted his articles for *Epilogue* in *The Common Asphodel* (New York: Haskell House, 1949), *The Crowning Privilege* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1956), and *Food for Centaurs* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970).
36. 'Neo-Georgian Eternity,' *Epilogue II* (Summer 1936): 231–42; 'This What-I-Mean,' Robert Graves *Complete Poems*, Volume 3, edited by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999), 402–3.
37. It is my contention that Graves suppressed the publication of this poem due to the controversial nature of its contents. As Dunstan Ward points out, 'This What-I-Mean' was written with Laura Riding in view (see Graves, *Complete Poems*, Volume 3, 555). The poem makes explicit (and explicitly sarcastic) references to Riding's suicide attempt and previous affiliation with the Fugitive poets.
38. Graves, 'Neo-Georgian Eternity', *Epilogue II*: 238–9.
39. Graves, 'Neo-Georgian Eternity', *Epilogue II*: 242.
40. Graves, *Complete Poems*, Volume 3, 403.
41. Riding, 'Poems and Poets', *Epilogue I*: 152.
42. Robert Graves, *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry: A Political Analogy* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929), 19.
43. On Laura Riding's self-declared 'evangelic' vocation, see Deborah Baker, *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993), 351, 355.
44. Private correspondence between Laura Riding and Albert W. Burns, cited by Joyce Piell Wexler, *Laura Riding, a Bibliography*, 141.
45. Robert Graves, 'The Art of Poetry', *Paris Review*, no. 47 (1969): 119–45. Republished in *Conversations with Robert Graves*, edited by Frank L. Kersnowski (Jackson and London: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 105.
46. Laura Riding, 'The End of the Word and After', *Epilogue III* (Spring 1937): 1–3.