

Editorial

Dunstan Ward

This is the first electronic issue of *Gravesiana*. Following discussion over several years, the decision to go online was finally taken at the meeting of Robert Graves Society during the 2008 Robert Graves Conference at Oxford.

One major advantage is accessibility. In his article on Graves's American reputation John Woodrow Presley, Vice-President (Americas) of the Robert Graves Society, 'applaud[s] the society's growing reliance on the internet. All that can be done [...] to help Graves scholarship more rapidly appear in print (especially on the internet) should be undertaken.'

Online publication should also help solve the problems which have beset the journal, causing delays in the appearance of several issues, including this one: we owe apologies to our readers and gratitude for maintaining their commitment to this vital forum for Graves studies. Past history and hostages to fortune notwithstanding, our aim is to bring out the journal on time every year.

This *Gravesiana* is a 'first' in other ways. It features a hitherto unrecorded 'letter from the front' which Robert Graves sent in 1915 to his old school magazine, *The Carthusian*. Eric Webb convincingly identifies Graves as the anonymous author of 'Is my Team Ploughing...?'. He suggests that it is really a letter to 'Dick', the younger schoolmate whom Graves loved, and, moreover, 'an *apologia pro vita sua* on the eve of battle'.

Another discovery is the exact site of the shop that Robert Graves and Nancy Nicholson ran on Boars Hill, five miles from Oxford, in 1919–21. Philip Stewart's account of his researches is illustrated by the shop sign 'almost certainly' painted by Nancy Nicholson, the report in the *Daily Mirror*, and a view of the spot where the shop stood.

Dominic Hibberd's article in the 'Critical Studies' section is ground-breaking in a different sense. It reveals the extent to which

Goodbye to All That re-invented in 1929 the Robert Graves of the wartime letters and poems, and how different his earlier attitudes were both to the war and to poetry about it. The much-quoted episode in *Goodbye* when Graves tells Sassoon that he will change his style after he has been in the trenches is just one of the numerous points where Dominic Hibberd sets the record straight.

The articles by Eric Webb and Dominic Hibberd are among several in this issue that might be considered to answer the plea of a speaker at the 2008 Oxford meeting for Graves criticism that eschews ‘hagiography’. Norman Austin dissects with forensic precision Graves’s *modus operandi* in *The Greek Myths*. However, far from merely doing a hatchet job (like an infuriated academic a few years ago in the *TLS*), Professor Austin demonstrates both the weaknesses and the strengths of the work. And he even concludes that ‘Graves himself would be astonished to discover how deeply the Goddess theory has infiltrated into the Academy’.

Nonetheless, in American universities John Woodrow Presley finds that there is an alarming lack of interest in Robert Graves’s work. Among a multiplicity of factors that Professor Presley examines is the low rating accorded to Graves’s work by those academic equivalents of Standard & Poor’s, the Norton Anthology and its predecessor, the Untermeyer anthology in its successive editions. There has been, too, the aggressive campaign conducted by Laura Riding and her followers during her lifetime and since. The Graves-Riding collaboration, the subject of two articles in the last *Gravesiana*,¹ is in this issue viewed from the ‘other side’ by Mark Jacobs.

Any hagiographical risk inherent in her theme is surely avoided in Anne Mounic’s luminous study of the connections between Robert Graves’s work and the Bible. And as well as the poet, the mythographer and the biblical scholar, Graves the historical novelist is represented by the late Peter Christensen’s exposition of ‘family melodrama’ in the Claudius novels, and by John Woodrow Presley’s incisive analysis of *Antigua, Penny, Puce* in terms of ‘Sources, Collaborators, and Critique’.

In this *Gravesiana* we commemorate three outstanding supporters of the Robert Graves Society, whose deaths in 2010 bring to members of the society a real sense of personal loss.

Alan Sillitoe was a wonderful friend to the society and to the cause of Graves studies. His inimitable talks and readings from his novels, poetry and letters at Robert Graves Society events in Oxford, Mallorca and Paris will always be treasured; they are evoked by Lucia Graves in her ‘personal memory’ of Alan Sillitoe. The society has been enriched by the whole-hearted involvement of one of the key writers of our times.

The highly productive scholarly life of Professor Colin Wells, distinguished classicist, archaeologist and historian, who presented elegantly erudite papers at Robert Graves conferences in Paris in 2004 and Oxford in 2008, is celebrated by his friend and former colleague Frank Kersnowski. Joseph Bailey, a fellow member of the council of the Robert Graves Society, pays tribute to the late Colin Allen. Elected to the council in 2004, Colin Allen gave a memorable talk on Claudius at the 2002 Rome conference; his counsel and genial company at the society’s events were very much appreciated.

The Robert Graves Society offers its sincere sympathy to Alan Sillitoe’s wife, Ruth Fainlight, to Mrs Kate Wells, to Mrs Patricia Allen, and to their families.

As editor of this issue, I wish to thank Lucia Graves and Patrick Villa for their invaluable help. This *Gravesiana* is a ‘last’ in that it marks the end of my ten-year presidency of the Robert Graves Society. My grateful thanks go to all my friends in the society for their support, and my best wishes to my successor, Dr Fran Brearton.

This issue of Gravesiana is dedicated to the memory of Alan Sillitoe.

Dunstan Ward was formerly Professor of English at the

University of London Institute in Paris. With Beryl Graves he edited the Carcanet and Penguin Classics editions of Robert Graves's *Complete Poems*.
