

# **‘A militant disdain’: Modernism and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928)**

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‘The charmlessness of some of the best poetry of our time is in part due to a militant disdain of anthology standards and criticism.’<sup>1</sup>

There is no question but that *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (hereafter *Pamphlet*) is central to any discussion of Robert Graves’s connection with modernism. For biographical and thematic reasons, it is closely linked to *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*; indeed, the Carcanet edition marks that link by publishing the two essays together and even paginating them continuously. Yet neither specialists of Graves’s work, nor critics interested in modernism, have paid much attention to the *Pamphlet*. Is this because the arguments of Riding and Graves and the sheer wit with which they are made are so convincing that, barring the odd sweeping statement, we would agree that they were basically right in seeing anthologies as the wrong place to look for good modern poetry?

What is certain is that the *Pamphlet* was the first, and has remained almost the only substantial, work of sustained thinking about the anthology as a significant form of marketing poetry. For this reason alone, it is worth exploring what lies behind and beyond its sheer entertainment value: the more important issue of the esteem in which poetry was held – the social status of poetry – in the late 1920s, and ever since. The *Pamphlet* can be read as a pro-modernist answer to what in the Carcanet blurb are called ‘the awkward questions about the production and consumption of art in the mass markets of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries’. We first need to set the militant tone of the *Pamphlet* within the particular context of the struggle of poets in the 1920s simply to get their poems read, both for the poems’ own sake and because poets considered they had a reasonable right to earn a living from their labours. We might go on to look at the extent to which the

*Pamphlet* could be considered as part of a more general modernist disdain for such poems as could be found in anthologies, so that finally, we might realise how the critical consequences of the *Pamphlet* were both helpful and disastrous to the reception of modern poetry. Throughout, it will be the nature and function of anthologies which provide the connecting thread.

We need to begin by being quite clear that what Riding and Graves were trying to do in these two essays was part of a much longer struggle to capture the attention of what was termed the new reading public, those readers who, while becoming ever more numerous and literate, were also becoming ever more ignorant of, and even hostile to, poetry. Historically speaking, this is a modern phenomenon. The Industrial Revolution accelerated the rate of mechanical reproduction but, driven by business needs, it favoured the distribution of information in prose over that of poetry. As the preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) makes clear, a larger audience was not necessarily a more sympathetic one. The notion of the Grub Street poet dates from the late eighteenth century, and ever since every generation of poets has offered its own response to the unpleasant fact that in modern times good writing does not always pay. It is often argued that modernism dates from Baudelaire's definition of modernity,<sup>2</sup> but an equally pertinent source might be 'Comment on paie ses dettes quand on a du génie' ('How one pays one's debts when one has genius').<sup>3</sup>

If modern readers think that Riding and Graves were exaggerating the plight of modern poetry, they need only turn to a very influential book published in 1909, called *Literary Taste: How to Form It*, in which Arnold Bennett wrote:

There is a word, a 'name of fear', which rouses terror in the heart of the vast educated majority of the English-speaking race. The most valiant will fly at the mere utterance of that word. The most broadminded will put their backs up against it. The most rash will not dare to affront it. I myself have seen it empty buildings that had been full; and I know that it

will scatter a crowd more quickly than a hosepipe, hornets, or the rumour of plague. Even to murmur it is to incur solitude, probably disdain, and possibly starvation, as historical examples show. That word is 'poetry'.<sup>4</sup>

It is no coincidence that Baudelaire's definition of modernity and the history of the modern poetry anthology date from the same period. The first edition of the *Golden Treasury* appeared in 1861, compiled by the Carthusian Francis Turner Palgrave. Other anthologies followed, but neither Victorian nor Edwardian anthologies included work by living writers. These were a product of the modern age, and were very much in keeping with Virginia Woolf's famous remark, that 'on or about December 1910, human character changed'.<sup>5</sup> For it was indeed under the auspices of Edward Marsh's first anthology of *Georgian Poetry 1911–1912* that poems written during the twentieth century were set before the public for the first time in the form of an anthology. It was an immediate bestseller, running through nine impressions within a year and selling more than 15,000 copies. Its success set in train the fashion for publishing poems in self-defining groups which, sixteen years later, Riding and Graves were so vigorously to denounce.<sup>6</sup>

Such was the literary influence of *Georgian Poetry* that a single volume was able to give Graves two labels in one. He became a 'Georgian' because substantial selections of his work appeared in each of the last three volumes of the series.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, this added little lustre to his reputation because the last two volumes of the series were not as well received as the first three. Marsh's choice of poems was felt by many (including himself) to be out of touch with a post-war generation writing self-proclaimed new poetry. With the third volume (1916–17), which did sell well, Graves became a war poet because this was the only one of Marsh's selections to include the work of poets serving at the front. Here it is meet to pay tribute to the late Dominic Hibberd by adding a footnote to his discussion of Graves as a war poet.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps part of Graves's reluctance to accept the label stems from

his inclusion in this third volume of *Georgian Poetry*.

During the Great War Edward Marsh made an editorial decision which was to have considerable consequences on subsequent literary history: only poems sent in by living poets would appear in his anthologies. Not only did the work of those who are often considered as the greatest poets of the war – Owen and Rosenberg in particular – not gain the wide public attention that would have come if they had been included in the 1917 volume of *Georgian Poetry*,<sup>9</sup> but it was also implied that the three serving poets who were included – Robert Nichols, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Graves – were representative war poets. This impression was confirmed by their being discussed as ‘a half pleiade’ by T. Sturge Moore in *Some Soldier Poets*, a work which is sometimes presented as an anthology but which is actually a critical work which includes poems quoted at length.

As well as being a critical coup, the *Georgian Poetry* series was a commercial success for Harold Munro’s Poetry Bookshop. After the war other publishers were predictably keen to imitate his success, and the era of what Riding and Graves term the ‘trade anthology’ began in earnest. In 1921 Martin Secker published John Collings Squire’s *Selections from Modern Poets* and Algernon Methuen brought out his own *Anthology of Modern Verse*, which ran into seven editions within a year. The problem was that, whether they realised it or not, Squire and Methuen were doing something quite different from what Edward Marsh and Harold Munro had done. Each volume of *Georgian Poetry* was what Marsh called ‘a conspectus’: it offered a selection from a publisher’s list of single volumes, the titles of which were included, with prices and sometimes reviews, at the end of the anthology. In other words, their chief aim was to advertise already-published books of poetry. Squire and Methuen, on the other hand, were offering not samples but self-sufficient collections of poetry. Moreover, it was one thing to create the playful and critically meaningless category of ‘Georgian’ but quite another to pretend to define ‘modern poet’ and ‘modern verse’. In fact, Robert Lynd’s introduction to the Methuen anthology did it

rather well, but for Squire, 'modern poet' meant something written by anyone who was under fifty in 1918, and when he came to make his second *Selections* he simply moved the date on by five years.

Poets grew uneasy, the more so when they found that permission to publish and the choice of poem was often left up to the publisher rather than to the poet. Their doubts came to a head when, in that same year 1921, a third anthology attracted attention. *Modern American Poetry*, compiled by the American critic Louis Untermeyer, received a favourable review from Richard Aldington in the *Times Literary Supplement* of November 1921. There then ensued a lively exchange of letters on the question of 'Poets and Anthologies'. The first salvo was fired by T. S. Eliot, who wrote to express his exasperation at discovering from Aldington's review that he had been included in the anthology without his consent, a consent he said he would not have given in this case. He went on to extend the implied criticism of a particular anthology to anthologies in general, with the assertion that they were more likely to damage than to aid the work of an already-published poet.<sup>10</sup>

A week later Robert Graves endorsed and developed Eliot's views, in a letter which is worth quoting in its entirety because in its tenor and tone it contains the essence of the arguments of the later *Pamphlet*:

#### POETS AND ANTHOLOGIES

Sir, – May I heartily commend Mr. T. S. Eliot's courageous letter on the damage done to the individual poet by most anthologies of contemporary verse? A poet's capacities cannot in any sense be measured by one or two 'anthology pieces', a term which has come to have as distinct a meaning as the 'museum piece' of antique dealers; but beyond meeting him in anthologies, few readers trouble to search the poet out. Moreover, a poet who once gets marked with the ranch-brand of the anthology in which he first appears is thereafter made to suffer for the failings of the weaker

members of the herd, with whom he may have nothing further in common.

Some anthologies are better than others, and I wish to say nothing against Mr. Squire's and Sir A. Methuen's recent collections (which are to some extent authoritative), in spite of the heavy drop they have caused in sales of one-man volumes. But poets should take concerted action to boycott irresponsible anthologies of the following types: –

(1) An adventurer brings well-known names of the living and dead into close contact with his own for personal aggrandizement. I refuse to admit that good and bad poetry in proximity do not to a certain extent infect each other, even in the judgment of intelligent readers.

(2) A well-known critic (Mr. E. B. Osborn, to cite a definite case) produces a hugger-mugger of poems written by soldiers. The sentimental appeal runs the *Muse in Arms* into a number of editions, but the soldier-poet is rewarded with no royalties and good money is deferred from the sales of his individual volumes.

(3) There appears a *Commemoration* or *Charity* anthology claiming to be representative, to which a poet cannot well refuse a contribution, but which is as badly-edited often as (1) and as commercially depressing to his own volumes as (2).

(4) Any anthology is unsatisfactory if the contributors do not know beforehand in what sort of poetical company they will find themselves.

In spite of the threat of blacklegging by amateurs, let the professional poet make his motto with regard to anthologies: 'Nothing for Nothing and Mighty Little for Sixpence.'

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
Robert Graves, Islip, Oxon.<sup>11</sup>

There was little in the five years leading up to the conception of the *Pamphlet* in the autumn of 1926, and its publication in 1928, that was likely to lessen Graves's distrust of anthologies of living

poets.<sup>12</sup> Anthologies of every sort were compiled and, to make matters worse, sold well. The description given by Riding and Graves of the ‘modern trade anthology’ is, if anything, an understatement. In an increasingly consumerist society, anthologies continued to be the most popular form of offering poems for public consumption. In the wake of the Newbolt Report,<sup>13</sup> and the Hadow Report,<sup>14</sup> the anthology became part of the educational system, and these became a particular target of Graves’s exasperation, due partly to his conviction that English poetry was best not taught at all in schools, and partly perhaps for reasons bound up with his difficult relationship with his father.

Most important of all in provoking the *Pamphlet* was of course the increasing intimacy, especially intellectual, of his relationship with Laura Riding.<sup>15</sup> To the word-for-word collaboration she brought her own reaction to the disappointing sales of her first collection, *The Close Chaplet*, and her own experience of being anthologised in the *Fugitive Anthology*. Together with the purchase of their own printing press and certainly following on from the plea for the more careful reading required by modernist poems, the *Pamphlet* could be seen as a final stage in a long drawn out bid for literary independence, both for the poets concerned and for poems in general.

More could be said about these biographical considerations, but it is time to turn to the extent to which the hostility towards the trade anthology expressed in the *Pamphlet* could be seen as modernist. How far was it shared by, say, T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound?

The *Pamphlet* separated poems and, by implication, poets into two camps: the ‘moderns’ supposedly earning a decent living by writing down to anthologies, and the ‘modernists’ who were starving because they felt obliged to write away from the anthology mode. And yet it would be difficult to argue that the anthology form was inherently antithetical to the substance of modernist poetry, especially if modernism is defined in terms of a multiple point of view, fragmentation, collage, composition, impersonality. The mocking tone Riding and Graves employ

against their ‘hypothetical lark-anthology’ (*Pamphlet*, pp. 224–26) loses its edge if one sets it alongside Wallace Stevens’s ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird’, which was first published in an anthology in 1916.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, the ‘perfect modern lyrics’ which Riding and Graves said had been published in anthologies such as *Georgian Poetry*, those that went on to become anthology pieces – poems such as ‘The Kingfisher’, ‘The Listeners’, ‘Grantchester’ and ‘Romance’ – were to be found side by side with work by the modernist D. H. Lawrence. A little-known fact is that the original idea for *Georgian Poetry* had come from Rupert Brooke, who wanted to bring out a volume of experimental poetry, written by him but signed by various fictive authors: a modernist idea if ever there was one. It was his friend Eddie Marsh who suggested that it would be better to produce an assortment of real poems by real poets. The first volume of *Georgian Poetry* was to have included a poem by Ezra Pound except that (unsurprisingly) he and Marsh could not agree as to which poem should be included.

Ezra Pound of course was both a modernist and an anthologist. It was he who created the idea of Imagism, which he advertised with his 1914 anthology *Des Imagistes*. The oddness of that anthology’s title has puzzled critics, but I think it is more easily understood if one places the accent on the indefinite article. Like all the anthologists of that decade (the same goes for the *Wheels* series), Pound was only pulling a harmless publicity stunt: he was showcasing *some* poets whom he dubbed Imagists, not creating a school. The school, complete with roll call, rules and regulations, was constituted in the two anthologies edited by Amy Lowell, and from such an organised group Pound was at pains to distance himself, dismissing it as ‘Amygism’. He turned instead to editing the *Catholic Anthology*, the anthology which, by challenging Georgian taste and publishing ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ for the first time, could be said to have marked the advent of modernist, as opposed to merely modern, poetry.<sup>17</sup>

With the appearance of the trade anthologies after the war, did modernist poets actually start writing poems in such a way as to

avoid being anthologised? In fact they did but, ironically, this was partly in response to an invitation issued by that arch-villain of Riding and Graves's argument, J. C. Squire himself. It was he who, in the prefatory note to his 1921 *Selections*, issued the much-quoted clarion call:

The better production of our generation has been mainly lyrical and it has been widely diffused. Where is the ambitious work on a large scale? Where is the twentieth century poet who is fulfilling the usual functions of the greatest poets: to display human life in all its range and variety, or to exercise a clear and powerful influence on the thought of mankind with regard to the main problems of our existence?<sup>18</sup>

Rather naively put, but an interesting challenge and one which suggests that Riding and Graves may have got it the wrong way round: perhaps it was not the anthology which had created the modern lyric but the sheer quantity of modern lyrics which had created the anthologies? The complaint of Pound in trying to turn what were originally three, then four, Cantos into a poetic sequence is illuminating on this point. He wrote, in the summer of 1922:

Having the crust to attempt a poem in 100 or 120 cantos long after all mankind has been commanded never again to attempt a poem of any length. I have to stagger as I can [...] I have to get down all the colours or elements I want for the poem. Some perhaps too enigmatically and abbreviatedly. I hope, heaven help me, to bring them into some sort of design and architecture later.<sup>19</sup>

The highly influential commander was no doubt Edgar Allen Poe who had decreed that a long poem was a flat contradiction in terms.<sup>20</sup> A number of modernists obeyed the spirit of that command but circumvented the letter by writing not long poems,

but poetic sequences.

Interestingly, Graves did not do this. Instead, he became a dedicated anthologist of his own work. If one checks the titles of anthologies reviewed by the *TLS* during this period one realises that until 1928 the word ‘anthology’ was almost as frequently applied to selections of the work of one poet as to those of several.<sup>21</sup> In *Poems 1914–26*, Graves’s selection and rearrangement of his own previously published work was in effect borrowing a trick from the enemy. It was intended as an escape from historical labels by refocusing attention on the poet’s personal development, the first of many such collected editions, but in this it met with little immediate success. The *TLS* reviewer, for example, merely used the new arrangement to give Graves a new label, that of poet of the ‘grotesque’, and he drew attention to the injustice done to the reader by Graves’s selective method:

A number of poems to be found in previous books have been omitted, and among these are poems which have often appeared in anthologies, such as ‘Double Red Daisies’. No doubt the constant reiteration of a successful light poem in anthologies is annoying to the poet who cannot wish to be judged by such rather fortuitous successes, but Mr. Graves might well have made these poems fall into their proper perspective, not by excluding them, but by including them and setting them by the rest of his work for honest comparison.<sup>22</sup>

The reviewer’s response to Graves’s own anthologising practice raises questions which have to do with the impact of the *Pamphlet*. What kind of critical influence did it have? Was it well received? Did it lead to the outlawing of anthologies? Did it create a new critical sympathy for modernist poetry? Did this in turn recruit more readers to modern poetry?

Generally speaking, the *Pamphlet* was well received at the time, and has been ever since. The *TLS* review is probably representative, with the reviewer (Professor Clutton-Brock)

perfectly convinced by its witty arguments and chuckling at the wicked fun poked at popular poems such as ‘Cargoes’. But he somewhat gives the game away when he ends the same review with praise for two anthologies which, we are assured, are exceptions to the Riding and Graves rule, though their titles scarcely encourage us to think so: *A London Anthology* and *The Lure of the Hills*.<sup>23</sup>

The *Pamphlet* certainly did not stop poetry continuing to be published and sold in anthologies: even Riding and Graves had admitted that there was little likelihood of that.<sup>24</sup> What their argument did achieve, however, was to make anthologists more critically aware of what they were doing. Indeed, the *Pamphlet* led to what Riding and Graves were really pleading for: the making of responsible anthologies. One person in particular must have read and taken its principles to heart because he went on to become the most self-effacing and yet most influential anthologist of the twentieth century: Michael Roberts. Riding and Graves may not have approved of all of the poems contained within the covers of *New Signatures* (1932) and *New Country* (1933) but they could not accuse these collections of being the ‘mere wanton re-arrangement of poetry that has its proper place elsewhere, or nowhere at all’ (*Pamphlet*, p. 166). Even the title of *New Signatures* was a tribute to Riding and Graves’s notion of the ‘handwriting quality’ of every poet’s work (*Pamphlet*, p. 193). These anthologies introduced a group of poets literally bound together by views which they held in common as to the nature of new writing and, more importantly, its function. The very form of the anthology was perfectly suited to the poetical and political experience in which these poets wished to engage their readers: ‘to make a new harmony out of strange and often apparently ugly material’.<sup>25</sup>

In 1936 Michael Roberts produced his *tour de force*: *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*. This was the critical anthology of living poets which Riding and Graves had suggested might be worth doing, but which, in 1928, they could barely imagine. Naturally, it included the work of Riding and Graves (after what Miranda

Seymour calls a 'voluminous' and 'prickly' correspondence)<sup>26</sup> and it put into practice most of the principles implicit in the *Pamphlet*. The anthology was an overnight and enduring success: it sold 50,000 copies in its first edition and ran into three editions, spanning a half century. In so doing it resolved the quarrel implicit in the *Pamphlet*, between the popular moderns and the unpopular modernists. Roberts' responsible anthology made the modernists popular and modernist poems could now be comfortably read in an anthology. It is tempting to bring this account of the *Pamphlet* to a close with the warring parties and critical views reconciled, but the story does not quite end there.

In 1944 T. S. Eliot gave a talk to the Association of Bookmen which was entitled 'What is minor poetry?' In that talk he defined minor poetry as 'the kind of poetry that we only read in anthologies'.<sup>27</sup> In Eliot's now mellowed view of anthologies, he sees two merits in them. On the one hand, they may introduce the reader to obscure authors whom nobody else enjoys; on the other, he admits that:

To pass to and fro between a border ballad, an Elizabethan lyric, a lyric poem by Blake or Shelley and a monologue by Browning, is to be able to get emotional experiences, as well as subjects for reflection, which concentration of attention on one poet cannot give.

Like Roberts's anthology, Eliot's talk offers an appeasing response to Riding and Graves's declaration of war on trade anthologies but, like all gestures of mere appeasement, it is made at a price. In the case of Roberts, the modernists will allow themselves to be published in an anthology, but only if they accept the company into which they are put. In that case, it had meant excluding Thomas Hardy, Walter de la Mare, Edmund Blunden, Edwin Muir, Edward Thomas and Robert Frost from the definition of modern poetry. In the case of Eliot, the modernist will allow anthologies to exist side by side with slim volumes, but only if it is conceded that the slim volumes contain the major poetry and the

anthologies the minor. And there lies the problem: the poets excluded by Roberts were the very ones that the public most liked to read, and the only form in which they were willing to read poets unknown to them was the anthology. If the real problem was how to persuade the new reading public that they wanted to buy poetry as well as prose, then it looks as though the modernists (Riding, Graves, Roberts, Eliot) had won a battle for their own poetry, but they had certainly not won the war for poetry reading in general.

This was because they were waging the wrong war against the wrong enemy. Conducting a campaign against anthologies would not reverse the historical trend which Riding called poetry's loss of caste among other cultural activities (*A Survey of Modern Poetry*, p. 133). Nor would it recapture a readership for poetry that had been lost to other kinds of writing in prose. At best, poetry sold in figures of tens of thousands, but the reading public, new or otherwise, was potentially measured in millions. Blaming the anthologies was in the long run no more helpful than drawing attention to the shortcomings of the poets, the readers, or the whole mediating world of publishers, booksellers and university critics. All these had and still have a part to play, but the fundamental reason for the modern neglect of poetry is much simpler. It is inherent in the act of reading itself.

What, after 1910, was modern, in the sense of new, in the writing and reading of poetry? What had happened in the second half of the nineteenth century and has continued to happen ever since, until perhaps very recently? Quite simply, poetry changed from being something recited and heard to being something written and read. The written word had of course been around for a long time, but it was not until the late nineteenth century that it became the dominant form of cultural communication. In addition, technological changes altered the actual act of reading. Before generalised literacy, reading had been a social act, something shared and often done standing up. In modern times reading has become a private act, carried out in solitude and silence.<sup>28</sup>

It is that major communicative shift which accounts for the decline in the reception of poetry. Poetry is fundamentally an oral

art, and what poetry does better than any other use of language is what can be done in an oral culture. To quote James Fenton, ‘the voice is raised, and that is where poetry begins’.<sup>29</sup> The connection between a poet’s presence and what Walter Benjamin called his aura is not due, as Riding and Graves would have it, to the handwriting quality of the poem, but to its capacity to embody the poet’s bearing and gait, and his voice.

Riding and Graves were aware that poetry had lost the power of address, but they did not connect this to the loss of listeners; they had in mind a paucity of readers. Therefore what they and the modernists generally tried to do was to invent new forms of address by developing the possibilities of the written word. They hoped to use the print technology which had created the success of the novel in order to reinvigorate verse. Living in an era when the rapid advances of science were promoting the power of visual observation, an era when the visual arts – painting, photography, the silent film – were flourishing, it was only natural to borrow the same tools in order to achieve the same success. The poet became the man who noticed things, the poetic tradition became something seen in spatial terms, well-known poems were monuments, modern poetry was to be read in terms of images, punctuation, typography, and hieroglyphs. New paths could be traced on Helicon, and if the reader borrowed the poet’s eye, new countries and personal landscapes opened up. Modern verse and modern life itself became something to be mapped.

The visual turn was of course compatible with the revolt against the previous generation, against Tennyson, musicality and song. But in their whole-hearted rejection of the Victorians, many modernists failed to realise that they were throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Worse, they themselves became blind to the opportunities of creating new audiences which were created by the newly-invented sound technologies: the recorded disk and the microphone. At the very moment that Riding and Graves were surveying and pamphleteering, sound was being added to film and the BBC was given its Royal Charter.

The results of the modernist obsession with the written word

were not always unsuccessful, of course, but they could do little or nothing to create an audience, as opposed to a readership, for poetry. What some critics saw as the charmlessness of some of the best poetry of their time was not due to a militant disdain of anthology standards and criticism, but to a mistaken belief in the power of the written word. Riding and Graves's quarrel with trade anthologies was based on the idea that poems have a proper place, in slim volumes chosen and edited by their authors, in a cooperative corpus, in responsible anthologies, as opposed to an improper place, in irresponsible and even absurd anthologies. But books are no more a natural habitat for poems than cages are for birds. Books are merely storehouses, pleasant and convenient carrying-cases, for poems and other semiotic signs. Arguing for the independence of their work once it leaves their hands, Riding and Graves compare the poem on the printed page to a list of ingredients for a recipe which the reader, following the author's instructions to the letter, puts together, or not, as the case may be. A more apt comparison might be made with musical annotation. The words of a poem remain inert, even incomprehensible, signs on a page until a performer gives them meaning. They come alive when they are spoken aloud, to an audience, large or small.

It might therefore be best to end by reading aloud a poem by Graves on this very theme.<sup>30</sup> In its celebration of the few it contains some of the modernist disdain which was not critically helpful, but it goes well beyond the *Pamphlet* in what it says about the power of the spoken word. It offers proof that, whatever reservations we might have about Graves the modernist critic, they need not in any way prevent us from enjoying Graves the poet:

#### HISTORY OF THE WORD

The Word that in the beginning was the Word  
 For two or three, but elsewhere spoke unheard,  
 Found Words to interpret it, which for a season  
 Prevailed until ruled out by Law and Reason

Which, by a lax interpretation cursed,  
 In Laws and Reasons logically dispersed;  
 These, in their turn, found they could do no better  
 Than fall to Letters and each claim a letter.  
 In the beginning then, the Word alone,  
 But now the various tongue-tied Lexicon  
 In perfect impotence the day nearing  
 When every ear shall lose its sense of hearing  
 And every mind by knowledge be close-shuttered –  
 But two or three, that hear the Word uttered.

*University of Toulouse*

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry and A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, ed. by Charles Mundy and Patrick McGuinness (Manchester: Carcanet, 2002), p. 234. This edition is used for all references.

<sup>2</sup> ‘By modernity I mean the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent which make up one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable.’ Charles Baudelaire, ‘The Painter of Modern Life’, in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. and trans. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1970), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Baudelaire journaliste: Articles et chroniques*, ed. by Alain Vaillant (Paris: Editions Flammarion, 2011), pp. 43–47.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold Bennett, *Literary Taste*, rev. by Frank Swinnerton, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1938), p. 101. Interestingly, neither Bennett nor his later editor suggests anthologies as an antidote to this fear of poetry.

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> They were careful not to include *Georgian Poetry* in their general denunciation. Marsh worked for free: the money earned by the anthology was divided equally, half for the bookseller (Harold Munro) and the other half among the twelve contributors.

<sup>7</sup> Eight from *Over the Brazier* and *Fairies and Fusiliers* in 1916–17; six from *Country Sentiment* in 1918–19; eight from *The Pier-Glass* and one from *On English Poetry* in the last volume 1920–22.

<sup>8</sup> Dominic Hibberd, ‘A “Spirit above Wars”: Robert Graves’s Self-Portrait as Soldier and Poet, 1915–29’, *Gravesiana*, 3 (2010), 290–308. <[http://robertgraves.org/issues/22/2255\\_article\\_290.pdf](http://robertgraves.org/issues/22/2255_article_290.pdf)>

<sup>9</sup> ‘Ah, Koelue...’, a poem by Rosenberg, was included, but it was not a war poem. James Reeves later included the war poets (including Graves) in his 1962 anthology of *Georgian Poetry*.

<sup>10</sup> T. S. Eliot, letter, *TLS*, 1036 (24 November 1921), 770. Eliot adds that his opinion was shared by ‘a poet of a very different school and tradition from mine’.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Graves, letter, *TLS*, 1038 (1 December 1921), 793.

<sup>12</sup> As the *Pamphlet* makes clear, anthologies of dead poets and fugitive poems might be tolerated. See Graves’s own admirable *The English Ballad: A Short Critical Survey*, 1927.

<sup>13</sup> The Newbolt Report on *The Teaching of English in England*, 1921.

<sup>14</sup> The Hadow Report on *The Education of the Adolescent*, 1926.

<sup>15</sup> For more on this subject, see Mark Jacobs, ‘Laura (Riding) Jackson and Robert Graves: The Question of Collaboration’, *Gravesiana*, 3 (2010), 331–47. <<http://robertgraves.org/gravesiana/issues.php?id=22>>

<sup>16</sup> *Others: An Anthology of the New Verse*, ed. by Alfred Kreymborg (New York: Knopf, 1916).

<sup>17</sup> For more on Pound as anthologist, see John G. Nichols, ‘Ezra Pound’s Poetic Anthologies and the Architecture of Reading’, *PMLA*, 121 (2006), 170–85.

<sup>18</sup> J. C. Squire, *Selections from Modern Poets* (London: Secker, 1921), p. vi.

<sup>19</sup> Ezra Pound, letter to Felix Shelling, quoted in Humphrey Carpenter, *A Serious Character: The Life of Ezra Pound* (New York: Delta, 1988), p. 418.

<sup>20</sup> E. A. Poe, ‘The Poetic Principle’, published posthumously in the *Home Journal*, 18 August 1850.

<sup>21</sup> Between 1919–27, seven such one-poet anthologies were reviewed, containing selections from Wordsworth, Gourmont, Dobson, Maurras, Hudson, Havelock Ellis, and Plato.

<sup>22</sup> A. F. Clutton-Brock, ‘Mr. Robert Graves’s Poems’, *TLS*, 1328 (14 July 1927), 484. The solution offered in the *Pamphlet* for publishing a

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poet's work as a whole seems to have taken into account this advice.

<sup>23</sup> A. F. Clutton-Brock reviewed the *Pamphlet* in the *TLS*, 1383 (2 August 1928), 564.

<sup>24</sup> Two anthologists were probably spurred on to defiance after reading the *Pamphlet*: see Harold Munro, *Twentieth-Century Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929; 1933), and Richard Aldington, *Imagist Anthology 1930* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930).

<sup>25</sup> *New Signatures*, ed. by Michael Roberts, (London: Faber, 1932), p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Miranda Seymour, *Robert Graves: Life on the Edge* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 229.

<sup>27</sup> The talk was published in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), pp. 39–52. The quotations are from pp. 39, 42, 44.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the history of reading see, *inter alia*, Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), and Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> James Fenton, *An Introduction to English Poetry* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> From *Ten Poems More* (1930), in *The Complete Poems in One Volume*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000), pp. 314–15.