

Movement

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Movement, the belated summer issue of *Gravesiana* (4.3), is a between-conferences issue, deriving itself from work generated outside the tidal force of the conferences' overarching discourses. Longtime members of the Society and readers of *Gravesiana* will sense a retrospective vibe here in the concentration on the life and works of the friends and associates of Robert Graves. Let me put that statement into an historical context. In 1988, the precursor to *Gravesiana* changed its title from *Focus*, the original title adopted at its founding in 1972, to the more capacious *Focus on Robert Graves and His Contemporaries*. That broader scope was reasserted some twenty years later, following the first convening of The Robert Graves Society in 1996, when the journal split into two offspring: one, reclaiming the title *Focus*, would continue to publish pieces on the First World War and Modernism, while the newly-christened *Gravesiana* would be dedicated to 'the works of Robert Graves and those who were directly in contact with him or influenced by him'.¹

This issue of *Gravesiana*, and one of the last likely to bear this title, fulfills that vision, in part, looking at the lives as well as the works of people 'directly in contact' with Robert Graves, specifically, Frank Prewett, Siegfried Sassoon, Len Lye, George Johnstone, and David Thomas.

Serendipitously, it also aligns with the vision for the Society recently articulated by Society president Charles Mundye who, in July, 2018, at the business meeting that traditionally functions as the capstone to the biannual conference, expressed a desire for the Society to refocus on the various historical, social, and literary communities in which Graves's work reverberated and continues to reverberate today.

This issue of *Gravesiana* faces inwardly and outwardly, locating Graves's influence out in the world, and locating the world's influence in Graves. We have arranged our seven articles to

conform to a chronology of Graves's life (with a concentration on the early years) beginning with Dr. Eric Webb's treatment in 'An Indecent Exposure' of the arrest of George Johnstone in 1917, and concluding with Len Lye's impromptu dance in 1975 in the Jardin des Plantes de Paris, as recalled by Judith Child, his dance partner. Coincidentally, *Movement* opens in an English park and ends in a Parisian garden.

George Johnstone aka George Harcourt Vanden-Bempde-Johnstone aka Peter aka Dick aka Peter Derwent aka George Vandon aka Baron Derwent, of Hackness in the North Riding of the County of York, figures prominently in all accounts of Graves's early life. The intense, unlikely friendship from 1913 to 1917 has provided scholars opportunities to contemplate the complex question of Graves's sexuality, simultaneously so accessible and overt, yet also contradictory and out-of-focus. In her biography, Jean Moorcroft Wilson devotes more than four pages exclusively to Graves's relationship with Johnstone, mentioning that Graves composed the beautiful love poem '1915' for him. Johnstone's arrest in April 1917 for 'inciting a male person to commit an act of gross indecency', severed their friendship. In 'An Indecent Exposure', Dr. Eric J. Webb meticulously delineates the incident, the legal case it precipitated, and the characters who figured in the arrest and trial, with timely insight into the privileges of the aristocracy as well as yet another illuminating corrective to *Good-bye to All That*.

The issue of Graves's 'pseudo-homosexuality' implicit in Dr. Webb's article is raised in Anne Marsh Penton's 'Over the Whole Wood', a discussion of the friendship between Graves and fellow Fusilier David Thomas, whose death is commemorated in Graves's second volume of poetry *Goliath and David* (1917), and in the poem Paul O'Prey calls Graves 'second homosexual love poem', 'Not Dead'. Penton, Thomas's grand-niece, argues that the understanding between Thomas and Graves was deeper and more

complicated than is generally thought. In her lively and skillful analysis of ‘Not Dead’, she maps the poem’s abundant natural imagery to specific aspects of Thomas’s person and life, and posits that the state of being ‘not dead’ describes a phenomenological reality embodying Thomas’s spirit and personality, transcending the oppositions ‘alive’ and ‘dead’, and available to Graves through poetry. Her insight affords scholars an opportunity to trace thematic connections between early poems and the mature ‘not dead’ poems, such as ‘Counting the Beats’ and ‘To Bring the Dead to Life’, and what we might call ‘not dead yet’ poems, such as ‘The Legs’ and ‘The Face in the Mirror’.

Neil McLennan has solved one of the lingering biographical questions: when Graves, Sassoon and Owen met in Scotland in 1917, where were they? We know that in July 1917, Sassoon checked into Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh with what his presiding physician, Dr. W.H. Rivers, diagnosed as ‘anti-war neurosis’. He soon became infatuated with the game of golf, and visited many of the courses in the surrounding environs, in part, McLennan tells us, to avoid the depressing company of soldiers suffering war trauma. In fact, even though Sassoon had made plans to meet Graves, he couldn’t tear himself away from the golf course. McLennan sleuthed out the golf course that provided the *mise en scène* of their meeting. In his detailed, engaging account, he also suggests that at this meeting Graves may have influenced Owen’s work-in-progress – the poem that would become ‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ – and provides an overlooked historical perspective on the generosity the Baberton Golf Course showed to suffering British soldiers.

Sassoon makes a reappearance in ‘A Hard but True Music’, an article about war poet Frank Prewett by noted writer and folklorist Neil Philip. If generally slighted by contemporary literary historians, Prewett was once the toast of the Bloomsbury subgroup that clustered around Lady Ottoline Morrell, and thought to be an up and coming star. Graves met Prewett in 1920 and was

impressed with his poems; thirty years later when he learned that Prewett lay on his deathbed, Graves got Cassell to issue a collection of his poems, to which he contributed a lengthy introduction, assuring the book of a wide readership. Philip carefully and affectionately reviews the rise and fall of Frank Prewett, taking us from his discovery by Sassoon and his introduction into the *glittery* salon of Ottoline Morrell, to his humiliation and lonely sojourn as a farmer and author of humble articles on the dairy. Interspersed within his narrative are Prewett's poems, which Philip asserts represent a wistful Georgian sensibility at odds with evolving literary tastes. Reminding us of the unpredictability of the Muse, he also gives us a war poem that poet James Fenton has pronounced one of the greatest poems about the War.

Although Graves's friends and comrades do not appear in 'Repetition or Containment?', Dr. Chris Nicholson places Graves in the company of two authors who also suffered severe trauma during the war, the novelist Ernest Hemingway and the influential psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion. Nicholson's thesis is that war trauma eventuated in a pattern of self-harming that afflicted Graves and Hemingway for the rest of their lives. Digging into R.P. Graves's voluminous biography, Nicholson assembles accounts of Robert Graves's numerous injuries – many of them apparent accidents – that, in the aggregate, seem more than accidental. Nicholson grounds his discussion in the theories of Sigmund Freud and contemporary trauma scholars, Paul Russell, Gordon Turnbull, Bessel Van der Kolk, and others. In another fine chapter in his continuing psychological interpretation and contextualization of the work of Robert Graves, Nicholson points out that while Hemingway ultimately capitulated to the urge to self-harm by committing suicide, Graves somehow leveraged his struggle to create a cogent body of work, which bears its imprint. Nicholson believes that the violence in Graves's poetry, and particularly *The White Goddess*, perhaps the most often discussed yet most protean

of Graves's major works, carry the 'unconscious elements of Graves's war experience', transformed by his anachronistic religious nature into patterns of piercing and transfiguration.

Graves generosity and influence can be felt in 'Gravesiana', in which his peerless bibliographer Carl Hahn provides us with a foretaste of his soon-to-be published bibliography: a list of forty-one contributions Graves made to the works of others from 1917 to 1998. In Hahn's article are poems, first publications, and short pieces on a number of topics and people – Mabel Nicholson, Ruta Rosen, the military salute, Israel, the American Loyalists during the American Revolutionary War, factory farming, and Mallorca. Beyond pointing scholars and readers toward pieces of Gravesiana they would not have found on their own, Hahn's exemplary bibliographical research deepens the portrait we have of Graves as an inexhaustible writer, a resourceful friend, and a loyal citizen of his adopted homeland.

We conclude our issue with a lyrical anecdote that features Len Lye, the New Zealand / American artist whose abstract drawings graced the covers of early Seizen Press editions, and whose prose poems Seizen published as *No Trouble* in 1930. Judith Childs, the wife of the late painter and printmaker Bernard Childs, offers an impression of Lye, whom she and Bernard befriended in the late nineteen sixties in Boquerón, Puerto Rico. By then, Lye was an American citizen living in New York where he figured prominently among Graves's New York circle that included R. Gordon Wasson, the ethnomycologist, and the great choreographer, Jerome Robbins, along with Esteban Frances, Jess McNab, Marnie Pomeroy, and Ralph Jacobs.² We've appropriated 'Movement', the title of this piece, as the title for our issue to invite your consideration of the various similarities between Len Lye's vision of art as a way of celebrating, even dancing with, the constant change and flow of the world, and our constantly-changing understanding of one of the twentieth-century's most original and enduring poets.

NOTES

¹ Patrick Quinn, ‘Editor’s Introduction’, *Gravesiana: The Journal of the Robert Graves Society*, 1.1 (June 1996), 4

<http://robertgraves.org/issues/19/7547_article_3.pdf> [accessed 24 November 2018]

² R.P. Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), p. 300.