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## Missing Believed Killed? Graves and Contemporary Poetry

Sean O'Brien

My interest in Robert Graves's poetry developed quite late. When the one-volume *Collected Poems*, edited by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward, appeared in 2000, as a reviewer I found its scale disproportionate to its interest, and I wanted to draw a distinction between poets like Graves, who sometime wrote great poems, and Yeats and Auden, who were great poets. Not a distinction likely to win Graves's agreement, you could say, or that of his admirers gathered at this conference.<sup>1</sup> Yet I found myself returning to some of the poems from time to time. When Michael Longley's judicious selection of Graves's work appeared in 2013, it was an opportunity to think about the work again. I hope I have come to a better understanding, late, but I hope not too late. For the poet, there is what you admire, but also what you might learn from. One of the things that strikes me is how valuable an example Graves can be for younger poets now, if they care to notice.

This conference is not the best context for my remarks, but I'm interested in three main areas: in Graves's crossings between the worlds of the living and the dead, which remain suggestive even to a reader without supernatural leanings, at a time when Dante keeps being translated, and when Rilke is also to the fore; in the formal tension of some of the poems; and in some of the love poems. These rather provisional remarks roam digressively among these matters, which I hope suggests that I'm finding my way.

Having been declared dead in *The Times* on his twenty-first birthday, Robert Graves seems to have found his survival both a torment (as memory) and a privilege (in the opportunity to rise from the graveyard of Europe and exercise his art). As he puts it in 'Haunted', 'You grin at me from daylight places, | Dead, long

dead, I'm ashamed to greet | Dead men down the public street.' In these lines the loosened sentence structure (the punctuation is mostly commas) allows the speaker himself, as well those he meets, to be dead. This grim traffic with the underworld is at once a punishment and a resource, and it recurs in several guises. There is the matter-of-fact horror of the corpse in 'A Dead Boche':

Propped against a shattered trunk  
 In a great mass of things unclean,  
 Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk  
 With clothes and face a sodden green,  
 Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,  
 Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

The thing about the dead man is that he beggars comprehension, for all the meticulous and slightly Jacobean detail of the description. He remains a presence, as though death is in some way an active condition. This vision of something being finished but not over – as Thom Gunn puts it, of being 'part still of the done war' – also crops up in the four lines of the amazing 'The Untidy Man',<sup>2</sup> where man and child are somehow present in the one person in a collapse of time on itself, and his exploded limbs have, as it were, left the nursery, which is also the battlefield and an officers' dugout, 'untidy':

There was a man, a very untidy man,  
 Whose fingers could nowhere be found to be put in his  
 tomb.  
 He had rolled his head far underneath the bed:  
 He had left his legs and arms lying all over the room.

Here the tones of a moral lesson for the young, cousin to Belloc, and perhaps to Harry Graham's *Ruthless Rhymes*, and, further back, the Scissorman, are put in the service of events for which there is no precedent, and which travesty the language of

innocence. The coming and going between life and death is necessary in order for sense to be made and for horror and love to be given their due. Ghosts arising from these conditions are unlikely to wear Laura Ashley.

In Douglas Dunn's poem 'Dominies', a schoolmaster looming in the half-world of memory declares: 'I am already historical', and this seems true of Graves. Even in youth, he was to a significant degree the past. Although he supported female emancipation (as he saw it) and, when young, the Labour Party, it was remarked that Graves spoke and bore himself like someone from another age, as though marooned in the years before the Great War. His disregard (to put it mildly) for Yeats, and for Auden and many other younger poets, set him aside from some of the main currents of the inter-war years, although his influence was evident. His own diction yielded nothing to the contemporary (contrast Larkin in this regard). The sense of time he occupied in imagination was perhaps mythic rather than historical (a distinction later employed by an admirer, Ted Hughes, when writing about the Queen Mother, to whose daughter Graves said that he was honoured to receive her Gold Medal but could not accept any honour awarded by a politician). Which brings us to the myths themselves, or rather the myth, 'one story and one story only', that of the White Goddess, viewed by some as a contraption and by Alvarez, for example, as an obstruction past which real poems only emerged with difficulty.

In her essay 'Heaney and the Feminine',<sup>3</sup> Fran Brearton records that the first collection of Robert Graves's poems owned by Seamus Heaney was *Man Does. Woman Is* (1964).<sup>4</sup> The title encapsulates one of Graves's convictions and, as Brearton shows, it speaks to Heaney's characterization of masculine and feminine in his essay 'The Fire i' the Flint'.<sup>5</sup> Brearton, who is of course an admirer of Heaney's work, remarks that 'Heaney, like other male poets before him, genders the very writing of poetry in ways which, in the aftermath of second-wave feminism and deconstruction, seem now rather dated' (Brearton, p. 75).

To which Robert Graves might perhaps reply that dates have nothing to do with it, and that the conditions to which he refers are permanent and unaffected by temporary shifts in perspective and fashion, because, in the words of 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice': 'There is one story and one story only.' This is not a tenable position, but nor is Graves in a position, or inclined, to reform it. In the sex war as seen from the present, then, Graves seems to be dead, but he won't lie down. He can, at a price, be ignored or bypassed, as he bypassed modernism in favour of a vision which was prescriptive, exclusive (as modernism was) and (above all) necessary to his work (as various other modern poetic mythologies were to their authors). You might say he made a separate peace, of sorts. What the love poems offer, in part, is a remarkable diversity of dramatized situations. No, Graves is not going to present female subjectivity. How could he? But he does cover a range of human experience, with at times a stinging realism which would, at times, make talk of the Goddess as disguise misplaced.

Heaney was no fool, and neither are Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, who also greatly admired Graves from their student days. Longley in particular shows a fascinating development as a love poet from a kind of gilded formalism to a more intimate idiom. The slightly younger David Constantine writes of Graves:

I first read Graves, his poetry and *The White Goddess*, when I was sixteen or seventeen. Later I went to the lectures he gave as Professor of Poetry at Oxford. I owe him a great deal, but the debt can perhaps be summarised thus: he taught me that the language of poetry must be at least as rigorous as good prose; and he confirmed me in my own – my own kind of – devotion to the Muse.<sup>6</sup>

And in the generations before theirs, admiration for Graves's work had crossed divisions which may now appear decisive. Adopted by the 1940s poets whom the Movement derided, he also

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received fan-mail from Kingsley Amis and the admiration of Auden's contemporary, William Empson. Graves, we suppose, must have been on to something to appeal so broadly. One of his sternest later detractors, Donald Davie, seems to owe the tidal aria of one of his own best poems, 'Time Passing, Beloved', to Graves's 'Counting the Beats'. There is something of the king-over-the-water about Graves, choosing to live [here] in Mallorca, not, it seems, with an exile's melancholy but with a sense of access to a further, more authoritative dimension of the imagination, as well as an inescapable vocation to suffer, worship and illuminate in a setting where the goddess made her presence felt, to bear witness to the cycles of a myth.

Yet I don't have quite the sense that Graves's work has the same degree of audibility and presence to younger poets at present as it did to many of their predecessors, though I'm happy to be shown otherwise. And I wonder what there is in Graves's poetry and in his thinking about poetry that might be commended to the current generation of poets, many of whom seem to be caught in the feedback loop of the New York School.

This comparative neglect, if that's what it is, is partly a matter of fashion, partly of inevitable biographical happenstance. As we know, with some exceptions, poets' reputations and readerships tend to shrink in the periods following their deaths. Yeats, Eliot and Larkin are evidently such exceptions, but Lowell and Berryman seem somehow to be held in lower regard, as do Gunn and even, marginally, Ted Hughes. We can of course make distinctions between the core readership of critics, scholars, serious devotees, and other poets, and the larger public further from the centre of activity. There the general esteem in which poetry is held in the Anglophone world seems to continue in gradual decline. When, for example, Auden's centenary came up in 2007, it was clear that he was a less than familiar figure to people of whom more might have been expected. For them Auden was a remote and neglected writer who might benefit from their temporary curiosity. Nowadays, it seems, there are no posthumous

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contemporaries except Sylvia Plath. And by and large in the popular imagination Graves is the author of *I, Claudius*, and perhaps ‘Welsh Incident’ and ‘The Persian Version’.

Graves, knowing how the times would answer, once wondered what was wrong with the idea of a canon of two or three hundred books which educated people could be expected to have read. What would he make of universities where some teachers of literature have no interest in poetry and feel no shame about it? And where close textual reading is becoming a rarity, a condition left to the poets who teach Creative Writing to mitigate? Graves might well have taken a dim view of the institutional teaching of writing, though he did once in a time of particular indigence express a willingness to teach poetry to old ladies, provided he was paid to do so. As a teacher of Creative Writing I think that we underestimate old ladies at our peril. At the same time I worry that even gifted students have less sense than before of the traditions to which their own work is related.

Looking for what it is that leaves Graves slightly to one side (though in a sense he always wanted to be there), one thing slightly less in evidence in contemporary poetry is the mythopoeic character of much twentieth century work – for instance, Pound, Eliot, Yeats, David Jones, Graves, Auden, Hughes, Hill, Heaney – though there are signs of it in Toby Martinez de las Rivas’s first collection, *Terror*. The idea that poetry makes or discovers order seems to have a more limited and local application now. Things have perhaps actually fallen apart, leaving an acceptance of the fact that a totalizing vision, a unified imaginative field, is no longer, or at least rarely, a prospect: at least until someone comes along and proves otherwise, which with luck could be any day. This is not necessarily a matter of writing epics, but rather of a unifying ground of creation, an integrity which Graves saw extending to the poet’s sense of his relationship with society, which had to be one of watchful independence. At the same time as obeying the dictates of his own myth, Graves insisted that poems were to be understood, that they should make sense, not in

the banal way that might comfort Jeremy Paxman, but as the outcome of their art. In his poem 'The Makers', the sometimes rather Gravesian Howard Nemerov evoked pre-Orphic poets, whose priorities remain in force:<sup>7</sup>

They were the first great listeners, attuned  
To interval, relationship, and scale,  
The first to say above, beneath, beyond,  
Conjurors with love, death, sleep, with bread and wine.

Sense, then, is musical sense. Such a conception of poetry doesn't sit easily with the commissions, competitions, prizes and other forms of patronage which occupy a great deal of the public sphere of poetry nowadays, when older poets, themselves the beneficiaries of some of this, watch at times with a mixture of disquiet and irritation the anxious scrambling of their younger counterparts to be professionalized, often long before professionalism is evident in their work. Nemerov again, with a damning quatrain called 'On Being a Member of the Jury for a Poetry Prize':

*Jury's* the *mot juste* under our ground rules:  
I may say Guilty, and I mostly do,  
But sentencing's beyond me, poeticules,  
As, by your poems, it's beyond most of you.

The only way out of this cul-de-sac is with the words on the page, the poem written since it demands to be written and to achieve form, with a very occasional reward, in Graves's words, in 'the sense that what [the poet] has written not only stands on all four feet, but has sufficient animation to walk away by itself, and perhaps go on walking long years after his death'.<sup>8</sup> As Paul O'Prey remarks in his introduction to Graves's *Collected Writings on Poetry*,

The majority of Graves's criticism is predominantly concerned with three fundamental issues: the nature and process of poetic 'inspiration'; the social and moral purposes of poetry, and the poet's role in society; the professional standards of modern poets. Graves invariably writes from the point of view of a practising poet rather than that of an academic critic.<sup>9</sup>

That's putting it mildly. Graves himself wrote that: 'in the Foreword to *On English Poetry* I describe my work as no more than "an irregular approach to the problem of the nature of poetic art: workshop notes."' <sup>10</sup> Time and again Graves shows poetry as a practical activity, a task. One such 'workshop note' states that 'rhyme must come unexpectedly and yet inevitably, like presents at Christmas, and convey the comforting sense of free-will within predestination' <sup>11</sup> This is surely true, and in its domestication of large matters sounds rather like Auden; or rather, of course, Auden sounds like this, being another resident of the haunted house of comfortable [Englishness] fixed to the earth by ritual. Graves was to arrive at his own 'system' in the form of his mythology: why should he need another, an equivalent of the various literary-critical ideologies that have risen and fallen since the 1930s? O'Prey calls the matters concerning Graves as a critic fundamental, and indeed they are, and yet questions of inspiration, poetry's social and moral function, and the poet's role are not by and large matters on which most younger contemporary poets speak with confidence or authority.

As to the practical character of writing poems, W. F. Bateson, in the 1972 'Epilogue' to his book *English Poetry and the English Language*, turns from admiration of Auden's own 'Epilogue' to *The Orators* (calling 'the gap is the grave where the tall return' 'one of the best lines in the English language', which might be stretching a point) to Graves's own 'On Portents'. <sup>12</sup> Here follows a brief digression: this is probably not an original observation, but as we know, Graves metaphorically rose from the grave, and was

tall, and returned from the battlefield to live almost a further Biblical span; and this eerie coincidence (if that's what it is) in Bateson's essay provides an inkling of the elements of a potential poem – words, overtones, chance resemblances on the brink of seeming 'meant', seeming 'necessary', revealing a kind of sense-music – as they approach the point of coalescence. For the reader this gives a practical sense of the moment before creation, of what Graves himself seems to have in mind when he describes the trance-state of composition, which is not all that different from Coleridge's sense of the imagination capable of forming new wholes. The example Bateson chooses to discuss, 'On Portents', is, of course, a finished piece, which, like Auden's line from 'Oh where are you going', is concerned with prophecy:

If strange things happen where she is,  
 So that men say graves open  
 And the dead walk, or that futurity  
 Becomes a womb and the unborn are shed,  
 Such portents are not to be wondered at,  
 Being tourbillions in Time made  
 By the strong pulling of her bladed mind  
 Through that ever-reluctant element.

Laura Riding appears to have thought that time stopped. Perhaps it did when she was around. If, as seems likely, Riding is the 'She' of this poem, she also has the power to alter the usual order of events. But for my purpose this is not the most pressing feature of the poem. More interesting is the fact that it reads as a *dramatic* poem, as though it might have been excerpted from a play: being an account offered by a witness and explainer, with Shakespearean overtones (of the 'sheeted dead' in the streets of *Julius Caesar*, and perhaps of Ulysses's address to Achilles in *Troilus and Cressida*). This accounts for what at first seems like the flatness of the close, where the strange events are accounted for but not then recomposed as 'a conclusion' of an epigrammatic

or epiphanic kind struggled for in a great many contemporary poems. In fact, by then the speaker has done his work, and in any case the poem's power lies not so much in ostensible content as in the relationship of rhythm and metre running under the sobriety of the utterance. (How often Graves treats the materials of passion with sobriety.) Graves wrote that 'the rhythmic part of poetry consists in emotional variations on a given metrical norm',<sup>13</sup> which is fair enough, but as Bateson demonstrates, the variations are resolved, or composed, into a larger unity. Bateson writes:

Apparently the poem is in blank verse: five of the eight lines are decasyllables. And as none of the lines is indented we naturally – and surely rightly – take them all to be metrically equivalent. But this cannot be done by counting syllables: three of the lines are only octosyllabic. What the reader finds himself doing is adjusting all eight lines so that they can be read with the same total stress-weight. To scan the poem we have therefore to adopt the four degrees of stress recommended by some modern philologists - and when this is done, a much more sophisticated poem emerges (p. 103).

Bateson then prints the poem with the degrees of stress marked. By his reading, the accumulated stress-weight of each line is twenty-four. Interesting. Perhaps we don't want a poem which can be converted into an arithmetical answer, but his approach does demonstrate unity-within-variety. Some would prefer to note that each line has (arguably) four main stresses. (Michael Donaghy, who has been coming to mind all the time I've been thinking about this lecture, remarked that he was more interested in stresses than syllable-counting.) In Graves's poem there is a quiet but marked tension between the ordered clarity of the utterance, which occupies a single sentence, and the organization of sound.

Bateson traces this in detail, but what even his meticulous account cannot do is recreate the experience of reading and hearing the poem. The best image for this I've come across (here

is another digression) is in Neil Ascherson's book *Black Sea*, where he describes the observations made in the Bosphorus in 1680 by Luigi Ferdinando Marsigli, which bore out the description by Apollonius of Rhodes in *The Voyage of the Argonauts*.<sup>14</sup> Marsigli confirmed that whilst it was true that the Black Sea emptied into the Bosphorus, there was also a deeper, more saline current running from the Aegean (and thus the Mediterranean) into the Black Sea. Opposed yet complimentary, mutually dependent. On a thematic note, in a digression-within-digression, and at the risk of sailing into a zone of poetic associations which might exasperate the critic, the reader will also be struck by what Ascherson goes on to say about the Black Sea itself, that it was traditionally observed to be teeming with life and yet is also, below a depth of 100 metres, dead, and that what killed its vast lower depths was a surplus of organic materials entering the Black Sea from the river systems which empty into it the Dnieper, the Dniester, the Don and the Danube. The living and the dead are simultaneously present, in fact as well as metaphor.

### **To Bring the Dead to Life**

To bring the dead to life  
Is no great magic.  
Few are wholly dead:  
Blow on a dead man's embers  
And a live flame will start.

Let his forgotten griefs be now,  
And now his withered hopes;  
Subdue your pen to his handwriting  
Until it prove as natural  
To sign his name as yours.

Limp as he limped,  
Swear by the oaths he swore;

If he wore black, affect the same;  
If he had gouty fingers,  
Be yours gouty too.

Assemble tokens intimate of him --  
A ring, a hood, a desk:  
Around these elements then build  
A home familiar to  
The greedy revenant.

So grant him life, but reckon  
That the grave which housed him  
May not be empty now:  
You in his spotted garments  
Shall yourself lie wrapped.

One can imagine a kind of non-official funeral at which this poem might form the words of the service, affirming in another form of words that 'in the midst of life we are in death'. The friction in this poem, the dialectic, is between the terror that should accompany necromancy and the actual matter-of-factness of its handling. In one sense this is a ghost story, with a comeuppance for the curious intruder, 'you'. But there is a larger 'reveal' in the time-structure of the closing stanza, with its implication that that its sombre promise has already been fulfilled. Of course, the origins of this ambiguous occupation of the world and the grave can be sought in Graves's experience, and he insisted that poetry should be read in this way asking, 'who has ever successfully disguised his character in what he wrote?' For poets working now there is interest in the 'tough reasonableness' of the voice as it deals with a kind of metaphysics that doesn't necessarily require assent to the supernatural. There is also the whole matter of the poem's address, which operates in a sort of mild imperative and is aimed at 'you', the democratic 'one'. The poem offers in part an ironic instruction to the novice, but the

'you' is also a means of self-address, and this makes the poem a rehearsal of something long known, where the speaker paces a cell with no exit or date of release. It's not a ghost story, then, or not only a ghost story: it's a horror story about consciousness: one that seems to have been admiringly burlesqued in Thom Gunn's 'In the Tank':

The jail contained a tank, the tank contained  
A box, a mere suspension at the centre,  
Where there was nothing left to understand,  
And where he must re-enter and re-enter.

I seem to remember first reading this in Gunn's collection *Touch* in the late 1960s with a sense of what might be called despondent triumph at the poem's perfectly engineered negation. And seemed it must be true: the poem's form made it so. Looking back from Gunn's poem at Graves's involves a reminder that form itself can be a mode of intelligence, and not only the embodiment of an attitude but a form of prophecy. The poet and critic John Holloway wrote: 'the imaginativeness and strangeness of Robert Graves [were] largely ignored by the Movement: 'what has been learnt from him is a less remarkable but less tricky quality, his dry, depreciatory, yet often tolerant tone'.<sup>15</sup> If this is so, the separation seems needless, and the poet now at work could do worse than try to re-unify these parts of the poetic whole.

### **The Cool Web**

Children are dumb to say how hot the day is,  
How hot the scent is of the summer rose,  
How dreadful the black wastes of evening sky,  
How dreadful the tall soldiers drumming by,  
But we have speech, to chill the angry day,  
And speech, to dull the rose's cruel scent,

We spell away the overhanging night,  
We spell away the soldiers and the fright.  
There's a cool web of language winds us in,  
Retreat from too much joy or too much fear:  
We grow sea-green at last and coldly die  
In brininess and volubility.  
But if we let our tongues lose self-possession,  
Throwing off language and its watery clasp  
Before our death, instead of when death comes,  
Facing the wide glare of the children's day,  
Facing the rose, the dark sky and the drums,  
We shall go mad, no doubt, and die that way.

This would suggest that, as the song 'Love and Marriage' puts it, you can't fruitfully have the one (the controlled tone) without the other (the imaginativeness and strangeness). Where does 'The Cool Web' happen? In at least two places which occupy the same site: partly in the permanent present of poetic attention, partly in a half-ballad territory which neighbours Hardy's, Housman's and De La Mare's, one where concreteness is not the uppermost concern, where love and death are swiftly evoked. The alternatives it sets out are either an acceptance of the 'watery clasp' of a presumably protean language, which leads, perhaps, to an excessive orthodoxy, an ultramontane fidelity, and to sterility and exhaustion; or else an adult exposure to the maddening glut of experience without a child's capacity to learn a way out of it; followed by death. The dryness Holloway spoke of is clearly present in the understatement of the conclusion: you die of exhaustion or you die by being overwhelmed, and it is not clear that either is actually to be preferred, while in any case choice doesn't seem to be at issue, for these are experiences in which, as in the case of rhyme, the sense of free will is only a manifestation of predestination. As Peter Porter put it, 'The cost of seriousness is death.' Graves's clear-eyed pessimism needs, of course, to be seen in the context of a very high estimation he placed on

imagination and language, whatever their human cost. The corrosive knowingness which follows the collapse of such standards, which can be encountered every day in a cultural sphere dominated by trivia, would surely have confirmed both his pessimism and his resoluteness.

As the subject turns to love, the resoluteness is, thankfully, at times revealed to be continuous with a sense of humour, for example about being too old for all this, as in 'The Face in the Mirror', with its accumulation of three-syllable weak-ending rhymes wearily declaring the flesh's willingness. Graves the love poet has a good deal of variety within the theme. 'We add might the chilling 'With Her Lips Only', and 'The Green-Sailed Vessel.' Or there is (in the poem's own words) the 'dirty, sly' 'A Slice of Wedding-Cake', approvingly quoted by Larkin, who finds it 'engaging', where the martyrdom of 'lovely, gifted girls' to 'impossible men' may not be all it seems. 'A Slice of Wedding-Cake' could have appeared in *New Lines* and is traceable in a debased form, and perhaps at a slightly less exalted level of society, in Larkin's 'Self's the Man'. Larkin, who wrote that Graves's Clark Lectures evoked 'a thrilling sense of vocation', also found Graves to be about the best example available to younger poets in a review written in 1958, but his feelings about Graves were always mixed, and in the same piece he also expressed a famous reservation about the quality of Graves's work; it's one which also seems to frame a reservation, as if in a distorting mirror, about his own:

It is ironic that Graves, whose view of poetry causes him to speak of 'a poem which is moon-magical enough to walk off the page – if you know what I mean – and to keep on walking, and to get under people's skins and into their eyes and hearts and heart and marrows' should appear incapable of writing that kind of poem himself.<sup>16</sup>

Really? I think more than a few people would disagree with Larkin's assessment. Larkin's view, it might be inferred, reflects an anxiety not to overrate poetry itself, rather than Graves; half a century on, we can see where under-rating it had/s got us, but we can balance that with the stimulus Graves offers.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> [Editor's note: The conference referred to is the Twelfth International Robert Graves Conference, 'Robert Graves: Humour, Irony, Tragedy, and the Grotesque, 8-12 July 2014, in Palma and Deyá, Mallorca.]

<sup>2</sup> [Editor's note: this poem is one of Graves's uncollected poems published in Robert Graves, *Complete Poems*, vol. 3, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999). Untitled, the poem's title was supplied by the editors.]

<sup>3</sup> Fran Brearton, 'Heaney and the Feminine', in *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*, ed. by Bernard O'Donoghue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 73-91.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Graves, *Man Does, Woman Is* (London: Cassell, 1964).

<sup>5</sup> Seamus Heaney, 'Fire I' the Flint', in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Volume 60 (20 April 2016)

<<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/proceedings-british-academy-volume-60-fire-i%E2%80%99-flint-reflections-poetry-gerard-manley>> [Accessed 24 April 2020]

<sup>6</sup> David Constantine, "'A grace it had, devouring": Apparitions of Beauty, Love and Terror in the Poetry of Robert Graves', *Gravesiana*, 3 (2012), 150-167 (p. 150).

<sup>7</sup> [Editor's note: Howard Nemerov wrote a very favourable review of one of Graves's 1955 *Collected Poems* in *The Kenyon Review*, 18, (Winter, 1956), pp. 131-136.]

<sup>8</sup> Robert Graves, *The Crowning Privilege: The Clark Lectures 1954-1955*; also, *Various Essays on Poetry and Sixteen New Poems* (London: Cassell, 1955), p. 19.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Graves, *Collected Writings on Poetry*, ed. by Paul O'Prey (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), p. ix.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Graves, *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry 1922-1949* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. vii.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Graves, 'Observations on Poetry', in *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry 1922-1949* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), pp. 1-26 (p. 5).

<sup>12</sup> W. F. Bateson, *English Poetry and the English Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p.102.

<sup>13</sup> 'Observations', p. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Neal Ascherson, *Black Sea* (London, Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> John Holloway, *The Colours of Clarity: Essays on Contemporary Literature and Education* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1964), p. 86.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Larkin, Review of *Steps*, *Manchester Guardian*, 19 December 1958, in Larkin, *Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite (London, Faber and Faber 2001), p. 183.