Drawing Music from Penny Fiddles, or, a Biographical Account of Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke's Secret Lives as Children's Poets with a Look at their Neglected Masterworks, *The Penny Fiddle* and *I Am! Says the Lamb*, along with a Few Other Things

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Abstract: This essay brings into conversation the lives of Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke, two oddly similar yet dissimilar poets, and argues that by exploring the many correspondences within their lives and work, we may deepen the growing discussion of Graves's children's work while broadening it to illuminate the children's works of Roethke, which have yet to have been substantially reappraised.

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Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke seem an unlikely pair. They didn't travel in the same circles, nor are they commonly linked in academic discourse. Nevertheless, they have more in common than most would suspect. Their work was profoundly influenced by nursery rhyme, nonsense, and folk poetry, influences that corresponded with their serious interest in childhood and childhood's poetry. In the span of two years, each published an extraordinary collection of children's poetry: *The Penny Fiddle* (1960)[1] and *I Am! Says the Lamb* (1961),[2] respectively. Both collections are out of print, both have largely been neglected by the critical and scholarly communities surrounding the poets (and by the children's literature community as well), and both deserve

more attention. Both collections are a hodgepodge of poems gathered together not because they were all written as children's poems – some were, certainly, but only some – but because they live in a folklorish register, drawing on diction, meters, and images associated with traditional folk poetry, because both poets believed the poems – even those originally written for adults – were pitched within the hearing of most children.[3]

Like *I Am!,* Robert Graves's *The Penny Fiddle* pulls no punches. Sweetly archaic and even old fashioned in places (even for 1960), *The Penny Fiddle* still manages to speak to its child readers of love and death with a candour that might alarm twenty-first-century audiences.[4] Nearly all of the poems in *The Penny Fiddle* indirectly concern poetry and poets. However, the volume's penultimate poem ('How and Why') is the only to speak of poets directly, and apt for a poem preceding 'Warning to Children', it speaks of their death. Graves may not have known Roethke personally, but he was well acquainted with the vices many poets share. Graves drew upon that familiarity to craft a short, darkly comic children's poem that in its brief litany of how poets die describes two deaths that fit our unlikely brace of writers uncannily well. Its black humour and specificity would have doubtlessly charmed Roethke:

> How and why
> Poets die,
>   That's a dismal tale:
> Some take a spill
> On Guinea Hill,
>   Some drown in ale.
>
> Some get lost
> At sea, or crossed
>   In love with cruel witches;
> Yet some attain
> Long life and reign
>   Like Popes among their riches.

The relevant prognostications occur at the end of each stanza (for Roethke, line six; for Graves himself, lines ten to twelve). You see, although Roethke was thirteen years younger than Graves, he would die twenty-two years before him. (Roethke lived from 1908 to 1963; Graves from 1895 to 1985.) Roethke was a heavy drinker throughout his life, but during his final years 'he was frequently in a state of manic excitement'. He self-medicated with alcohol, drinking 'a good deal to control' his mania, often taking 'a glass of beer the first thing in the morning'.[5] On the day he died, Roethke was visiting a friend's house on Bainbridge Island in Washington. A bear of a man, he had just prepared a round of mint juleps when he was brought down by a coronary occlusion while enjoying the pool. Tragically, Beatrice (his wife) was across the Elliott Bay at the time, shopping in Seattle. Roethke was only fifty-five years old. Graves, meanwhile, continued working for some twelve years after Roethke's last swim. A decade later Graves's long life came to an end. Coincidentally, Graves also died on an island, Mallorca, where he succumbed to heart failure while resting in his lovely, two-story home of mortar and locally quarried stone. Graves's death was front-page news, *The New York Times* reporting that Graves 'died with his wife and other family members at his bedside. […] Church bells on the island rang out with a traditional song of mourning at the news of his death'.[6] He was buried in the local churchyard.[7] No, Roethke didn't literally 'drown in ale', nor did Graves quite live like 'Popes among their riches'. Still, 'How and Why' didn't miss the mark by much.

It's unclear exactly how Roethke felt about Graves's poetry, but we find evidence of his increased interest in Graves around the time Roethke began writing for children in earnest. Published three years before *I Am!* Roethke's *Words for the Wind* (1958)[8] is his first book to include a section marked as children's poetry: 'Lighter Pieces and Poems for Children'. That same year, poet James Wright (who was completing his Ph. D. with Roethke at the University of Washington) received a letter from Roethke containing a frank

(and frankly rare) appraisal of Robert Graves's work. Roethke confesses,

> Been reading [Robert] Graves and [Wallace] Stevens lately, and damned if I don't think both are over-rated. I get so tired of Stevens' doodling with a subject-matter – the same subject-matter. And Graves, while at least he's specific, is usually *thin*, I think.[9]

While by no means praise, his assessment grants both Graves's reputation (one tends to reserve *over-rated* for those who are highly esteemed) and his poetical exactness (*specificity*), which was a characteristic Roethke admired in poetry. Furthermore, while usually unguarded in his literary opinions, here Roethke marks his chief criticism (*thin*) with the qualification, 'I think'. A year later in 'How to Write Like Somebody Else' (1959), Roethke reveals his familiarity with Graves by way of praising W. H. Auden. He asks the rhetorical question, 'Is Auden a charlatan because he read and profited by reading [Wilfred] Owen, Laura Riding, Robert Graves'?[10] Roethke traces this influence with specificity – he knows Graves's work – choosing to illustrate his claim by comparing Graves's 'Full Moon' with Auden's 'As I Walked Out One Evening', noting the similar opening (Graves: 'As I walked out that sultry night'; Auden: 'As I walked out one evening') as well as a passel of imagistic echoes ('the street, the wheat, the fields') (*On Poetry*, p. 60).

During this period Roethke also made regular use of Graves's poetry in his courses at U. W., where Roethke taught for fifteen years. In *The Glass House: The Life of Theodore Roethke*, Allen Seager reproduces some student notes taken in one of Roethke's U.W. seminars. At the top of the page in pen are the student's handwritten words: 'Class Goodies'. A preponderance of said goodies concerns poetry (for example, the student records Roethke's characterisation of poetry: 'memorable speech').[11] Shortly before this concise definition, we find three telling words: 'Start Robert Graves' (Seager, p.181). It's unclear which of

Graves's many books our student was to begin, but it is likely *The Poems of Robert Graves: Chosen by Himself* (New York: Anchor, 1958), for, in a 1961 letter to Dorothee Bowie (the U. W. English Department's secretary), Roethke specifies the books he would like included in (what he calls) 'the Verse Course'. He mentions four texts, the first three of which are

> *The English Galaxy* edited by [Gerald] Bullet [sic] in the Everyman edition
> *Robert Graves Poems chosen by himself* [sic] in the Anchor edition
> Yvor Winters *collected poems* [sic] Swallow Press.

The fourth is 'Louis Untermeyer's combined anthology of British and American Poetry. The earlier edition that they always ordered *not* the last one'.[12] Note that Graves's collection sprang second to Roethke's mind. (Untermeyer's inclusion there at the end suggests that this is not an alphabetised list, but, even if it were, Graves's *Poems* is one of only two single-author collections.) At the very least, Graves's poetry had pedagogical value for Roethke. (And he took pedagogy very seriously indeed, earning the admiration of his students, who reportedly evinced 'the air of disciples').[13]

Theodore Roethke isn't mentioned in Graves's biographies, but, frankly, for much of the twentieth century mentions of Graves's life as a children's poet have appeared only slightly more often in the discourse surrounding Graves's own life and work. And if Graves isn't mentioned often in treatments of Roethke's life, neither are *Roethke's* children's books, something rather strange that they also have in common, along with a penchant for thinking of themselves as bears. (Something we'll return to in a moment.) Doubtlessly, Graves was familiar with Roethke's work (a voracious reader invested in keeping up with developments in the poetry world, Graves surely read Roethke's *The Waking*, which was awarded the Pulitzer in 1954),[14] and he may have been familiar with Roethke's children's poetry, as both participated in Louis Untermeyer's ambitious *Modern Masters Books for Children* series

in the 1960s, Graves contributing *The Big Green Book* (1962) and Roethke *Party at the Zoo* (1963).[15]

The back cover of *Party at the Zoo* briefly characterises the series, bragging that Untermeyer had put together 'a unique new series for the beginning reader by such world-famous authors as Arthur Miller, Shirley Jackson, and Robert Graves'. Its uniqueness lay not only in its stable of extraordinary authors, but also in the fact that the books married those authors with reading specialists. Following the example of the Harper and Brothers' I Can Read Books and Random House's series of Beginner Books, those specialists sent their authors limited vocabulary lists, akin to the approach Dr Seuss (Theodor Geisel) used to produce his 236 word *The Cat in the Hat* (New York: Random House, 1957). Unfortunately, as Lissa Paul explains,

> The series fizzled out within a couple of years, despite the fact that the famous American poet and anthologist Louis Untermeyer had managed to attract manuscripts from some of the literary giants of the day […]. The reading specialists employed for the project had no qualms about sending controlled vocabulary lists to famous authors. Those who obeyed wrote terrible books. Those who resisted often wrote terrific books – which, sadly, sank with the series.[16]

Of *The Big Green Book* and *Party at the Zoo*, Graves's is obviously superior (Roethke was one of the Modern Masters who dutifully limited himself to a circumscribed vocabulary, in his case, a list of only 268 basic words). Both books appeared just as the two poets became more professionally invested in publishing for children. *The Big Green Book* was published in 1962, two years after *The Penny Fiddle*. However, Michael Joseph reminds us that:

> Although Graves wrote poems he hoped to publish for children as early as 1916, […] it was not until he had produced *The Big Green Book* (1962) […] that he gathered

> them into two slim volumes, *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children* (1960) and *Ann at Highwood Hall* (1964).[17]

And yet, again, not much attention was paid to Graves's children's work over much of the twentieth century, another correspondence he shared with Roethke: but as the twenty-first century has deepened, we've seen increased study of Graves the children's writer, in general, and of Graves the children's poet, in particular. This interest has been driven by the scholarship of Michael Joseph, whose work certainly inspired this essay.[18] Since 2010, when Joseph published "*The Penny Fiddle* and Poetic Truth: The Children's Poems of Robert Graves" in *Poetry and Childhood*,[19] Robert Graves scholars have begun to recognise the importance of his children's poetry – and the importance of 'children's poetry' to Graves. By exploring the correspondences between Roethke and Graves, these oddly similar yet dissimilar poets, we may deepen the growing discussion of Graves's children's work, while broadening it to illuminate the children's works of Roethke, which have yet to have been substantially reappraised.

Still, Robert Graves's early interest in nursery rhyme has often been hedged or downplayed, even in very recent studies of his life and work. For example, in Jean Moorcroft Wilson's 2018 biography, *Robert Graves: From Great War Poet to* Good-Bye to All That *1895-1929*, Graves's abiding preoccupation with the 'joyous foolery' of the nursery rhyme[20] is characterised as a 'private world' that he and his then-wife Nancy Nicholson 'inhabited together' (p. 216), one inspired and fuelled by Nicholson, who 'had a significant effect on Robert's poetry for some years, leading him further into a world of nursery rhyme and song' (p. 214). There it's something of the primrose path here, along with the subtle implication that it's a path Nicholson's domestic and perhaps even womanly influence led Graves down. (Admittedly, Graves himself is not innocent of such insinuation: recall 'A First Review', which closes *Country Sentiment* [1920],[21] in which Tom [modelled on Siegfried Sassoon], a masculine, 'hard and bloody chap', exhorts him to 'have done with nursery pap' and 'Write like a man').[22] Elsewhere, Wilson

argues that 'Robert's increased focus on nursery rhymes and ballads was partly to provide Nancy with material to illustrate' (Wilson, p. 224). If his focus on nursery rhymes was only *partly* to produce something for Nicholson to illustrate, his other reasons are tellingly left unremarked upon.[23]

Similarly, when Roethke's children's poetry is mentioned at all in the criticism and scholarship surrounding him, it is relegated to footnotes and parentheticals, as if an embarrassment. This hesitance to explore children's poetry is common in the world of adult poetry criticism and scholarship – especially in the United States. Readers of *The Cambridge History of American Poetry* (2015) will not encounter a single chapter focusing on an individual children's poet, and one could read the lone, extended treatment of Theodore Roethke and come away completely ignorant of Roethke's forays into children's poetry.[24] More recently, only two essays in *A Field Guide to the Poetry of Theodore Roethke* (2020) mention Roethke's interest in children's poetry.[25] The first, Nicholas Bradley's 'Spirit, Self, and Shorebirds: The Pacific Pastoral of 'Meditation at Oyster River', raises the spectre of *I Am!* Not to discuss the poetry within, but only to note that it was in a review of *I Am!* That Ralph J. Mills Jr. first identified the traces of Whitman, Wordsworth, and John Clare in *The Far Field*'s 'Meditation at Oyster River' (and, as is convention, Bradley squirrels away his single reference to *I Am!* in an endnote). The second essay (mine) engages more substantially with his children's poetry, but I suspect that it appears in the *Field Guide* only because the editor, William Barillas, organised the book around every collection of poetry Roethke published in his life, using *The Complete Poems* as a blueprint. Luckily, *I Am!* is represented in Roethke's *Complete Poems*.[26] Each essay focuses on one poem. *The Far Field* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) receives the most attention (fourteen of its poems are granted a single chapter each), but only one book is represented by a single essay: *I Am!* (breaking the volume's constraint (one poem per essay) I use my space to treat three of Roethke's children's poems). I was chosen to contribute that essay simply because I am the only scholar who has written at length on the subject.[27]

Roethke was an imposing figure with incredible earthly appetites. In 'Fifty Years of American Poetry', Randall Jarrell, surely inspired in no small part by Roethke's cherubic, pinchable cheeks, famously characterised him as a 'sometimes babyish' poet. However, Jarrell clarifies that Roethke 'is a powerful Donatello baby who has love affairs, and whose marsh-like unconscious is continually celebrating its marriage with the whole wet dark underside of things'.[28]

Roethke embraced this persona. Seager points to Roethke's 1960 interview with Zulfikar Ghose, an interview in which, Seager explains, Roethke 'reveals the picture of himself he wanted to show the public then' (Seager, p. 268). The piece is called 'Roethke: I Ran with the Roaring Boys' and begins, 'Roethke is a large man with an attractive head, round-cheeked, and thinned greying hair. He has a deep sonorous voice with an incantatory ring about it' (qtd. in Seager, p. 268). Again, Roethke embraced his size, his deep voice, liking to imagine himself 'as a sort of dancing bear', a beast of a man animated by a love of wine, song, and poetry.[29] As Hamilton has it, Roethke was 'a big – some might say gross – man and yet at poetry readings he would literally dance to his own rhythms'.[30] He signalled as much in his verse. For instance, in the first of his 'Four for Sir John Davies' ('The Dance'), our ursiform poet aligns himself with the great beasts, insisting,

> I need a place to sing, and dancing-room,
> And I have made a promise to my ears
> I'll sing and whistle romping with the bears. (pp. 5-6)

His use of 'romp' here is telling. In the 'Greenhouse Poems' section of *I Am!*, we find another poem concerning dance, 'My Papa's Waltz', in which Roethke also uses the word ('We romped until the pans | Slid from the kitchen shelf'), tying it both to difficult, yet ultimately joyful familial love and the Dionysian appetite for drink that makes the aforementioned love so difficult (Roethke embodied that difficulty in the meter: 'We romped until the pans' is perfectly iambic, whereas the pans slide from the shelf trochaically. However, despite the substitution, 'Slid from the kitchen shelf' retains the

drunken waltz's three strong beats, ending smoothly with two iambs). Roethke would come to share this appetite with his father: you'll recall the mint juleps he prepared on the day he died, wading in a pool like a bear (Seager, p. 285). Such waltzing may not be easy, but it is fun while it lasts.

A large man, Graves too saw himself in bears. However, it wasn't only for their 'shaggy and ungainly' physique, as Robert Lowell put it (here thinking of Roethke) (Hamilton, p. 335). Rather, Graves found an additional set of behavioural correspondences: a kind of headstrong, bearish territoriality writ as poetic discrimination. Both Graves and Roethke wrote poems about bears, and both poems concern territoriality and a virtuous yet stubborn dedication to their peculiar ways: Roethke's 'The Lady and the Bear' (from *I Am!*) and Graves's 'To Be Called a Bear' (from *Collected Poems, 1914-1947*)[31]. Graves's poem describes how bears 'gash the forest trees | To mark the bounds | Of their own hunting grounds' (p. 416) (Note the initial anapaest in 'Of their own hunting grounds': the accent falls on *own*, doubling down on the point.) This territoriality reminds me of Randall Jarrell's *The Bat-Poet* (1964),[32] which features an incredibly territorial mockingbird who chases away the creatures it impersonates. Jarrell's bat-poet crafts a poem about the bird, concluding:

> A mockingbird can sound like anything.
> He imitates the world he drove away
> So well that for a minute, in the moonlight,
> Which one's the mockingbird? Which one's the world?

Just as Roethke and Graves saw themselves in bears, Jarrell saw something of himself in the mockingbird, and part of what he saw is the very poetic territoriality found in Graves's tree-gashing bears. Jarrell explains:

> I've known a lot of artists and poets… and… I write poetry myself—or anyway, I write verse myself… . Several times

> when I've talked with writer friends about [*The Bat-Poet*] I'm amused to see how they immediately identify with the mockingbird. (Laugh) […] Territoriality at its strongest is in mockingbirds… (pause) So, it seemed to me that…' mockingbirds are not only more like artists than other birds, they're more like people too.[33]

Graves's bears mark 'their own hunting grounds' as assiduously as the 'Pee-culiar' bear in Roethke's 'The Lady and the Bear' defends his way of fishing:

> A Lady came to a Bear by a Stream.
> 'O why are you fishing that way?
> Tell me, dear Bear there by the Stream,
> Why are you fishing that way?'
> 'I am what is known as a Biddly Bear, –
> That's why I'm fishing this way.
> We Biddly's are Pee-culiar Bears.
> And so, – I'm fishing this way.

The lady is so shocked at the bear's technique that she 'slipped from the Bank'

> And fell in the Stream still clutching a Plank,
> But the Bear just sat there until she Sank;
> As he went on fishing his way, his way,
> As he went on fishing his way.

Robert Lowell often addressed his letters to Roethke 'Dear bear' (Hamilton, p. 335), so Roethke's use of 'dear bear there' (doubtlessly encouraged by the triplet rhyme) clearly signals its biographical significance. The lady's shock and the bear's undaunted response provides insight into the singlemindedness of the practicing poet, even in the face of criticism (and evidence of Roethke's fearlessness about treating death in his children's poems, a fearlessness Graves

shares, as we've seen). Robert Leydenfrost's illustration depicts our Biddly Bear smiling at the reader; of the lady, all that remains are two high-heeled legs jutting from the stream: unfazed by the lady's fatal spill, the bear carries on 'fishing his way, his way'.

Graves is also interested in pursuing his own mode of poetry in an equally 'Pee-culiar' way. After describing the bears' purposeful mauling of trees – whose knotty roots twist into the chthonic depths even as their branches stretch skyward – 'To Be Called a Bear' notes that:

> They follow the wild bees
> Point by point home
> For love of honeycomb;
> They browse on blueberries.

The speaker asks, 'should I stare | If I am called a bear', adding, 'And is it not the truth'? before characterising himself in a way that befits Roethke as well as Graves: modulating from the third person 'they' to the first person 'I', he writes, 'Unkempt and surly with a sweet tooth' (recall Lowell's characterisation of bears as 'shaggy and ungainly'), 'I tilt my muzzle toward the starry hub | Where Queen Callisto guards her cubs'.

The story of Callisto, as told in the *Katasterismoi* (often attributed to Eratosthenes of Kyrene, likely incorrectly), fairly hums with the interpenetration of the high and low, the celestial and the mundane, the eternal and the corporal. The nymph Callisto, who pledged herself to chastity in honour of Artemis the hunter, was raped by Zeus, and when her pregnancy was discovered, she was transformed by Artemis into a bear. Graves calls her 'Queen', for she was the daughter of Lykaon, king of Arcadia, and – in the form of a bear – she would eventually give birth to Arkas, who would himself be named king. But Callisto was brought low by Artemis, and in the form of a beast, she would be hunted almost to death by her own son. Zeus, moved by her plight, rescued her, placing her among the stars in the constellation Ursa Major (Condos, pp. 362-63).[34] But in the poem, our more quotidian bear stares upward at its

estellated, divine image, placed there by Zeus, the heavenly constellation the result of the king of the gods' basest lusts, even as our bear's earthly love of honeycomb and blueberries, his pursuit of bees ('Point by point') driven by a sweet tooth, leads it to more celestial contemplations: Ursa Major, its shape (point by point) implied by the stars. The lust of the bear is the bounty of God. Here we find another similarity between our two poets: their shared belief that our unkempt and surly exploration of the sublunary world unlocks the heavens, that a poetry of the small, made for children out of short lines and old meters, can reveal enduring truths. Graves's bearish sweet tooth for blueberries and honeycomb points his muzzle to the stars, a metaphor for the poetic process of meaning making, instructing us, as Joseph writes, 'to disregard nothing – […] not even an apparently trite, didactic, cast-off children's rhyme – because anything may be transvalued by poetic truth'.[35] He continues, 'Poetic truth alone determines what has meaning and worth' (p. 88), a claim that holds true whether we speak of honeycomb or celestial constellation (for what are constellations if not the poetic imagination refiguring the cosmos?).

This is a rather Romantic impulse, one found also in Roethke, for the pair share a profound sympathy with Romanticism. In *Midcentury Quartet: Bishop, Lowell, Jarrell, Berryman, and the Making of a Postmodern Aesthetic* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1999), Thomas Travisano contrasts Roethke's Romantic impulses with his eponymous quartet. Of course, Travisano grants that they, too, were 'preoccupied with […] the wonder and darkness of childhood', but he stresses that they nevertheless 'found Roethke's work significantly more romantic' than theirs (p. 17). Joseph locates a similar Romanticism in Graves's work – specifically in *The Penny Fiddle*, noting that it

> taps into a tradition that goes back to the anti-Augustan, anti-materialist poets Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake, in whose works the social order is subverted to correlate poetry with material corruption and material corruption with transcendence. (Orphans, p. 14)

Indeed, both are particularly Blakean Romantics, summoning the binaries of innocence and experience only to deconstruct them, to fold them into one another even as they undermine the hierarchical thinking that tends to privilege one over the other. As Joseph writes (about 'Allie', the second poem in *Penny Fiddle*), 'One might go so far as to argue that Graves wrote "Allie" as a sophisticated children's poem, in a somewhat antiquated manner reminiscent of *Songs of Innocence*'.[36] He argues that 'Graves is challenging Blake's constructivist notion of a protected innocence', that he uses the poem as an occasion to 'reflect on his own ideas within an argument against Blake's formulation of innocence and experience (p. 259). Still, Graves writes within the Romantic mode both to summon and to challenge Blake's specific strain of Romantic thinking. In fact, Edward Hirsch's introduction to Roethke's *Selected Poems* (New York: Library of America, 2005) might easily apply to the Graves of *Penny Fiddle*. Hirsch proposes that Roethke 'transformed himself into a major romantic poet', that he 'courted the irrational and embraced what is most vulnerable in life. "Those who are willing to be vulnerable move among mysteries," he declared' (p. xiii). Later, he asserts, 'Roethke was an American poet of the regressive imagination', specifically linking him to Graves: 'He looked for guidance to the work of other modern poets who evoked the archaic to give their poems ritual power, such as W. B. Yeats, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence' (pp. xx-xxi).

Like Graves, Roethke was also enamoured with the short line, the accentual rhythms of folk and nursery rhyme, finding their rhythms, coupled with the rustic voice of the Wordsworthian everyman, perfect for his twentieth century variety of Romanticism. Roethke writes:

> The decasyllable line is fine for someone who wants to meditate—or maunder. Me, I need something to jump in: hence the spins and shifts, the songs, the rants and howls. The shorter line can still serve us: it did when English was young, and when we were children. (*On Poetry,* p. 93)

These qualities are evident in his children's poetry, as they are in Graves's. In his forward to *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*,[37] Graves implies his affection for the accentual, folk rhythms Roethke so admired by contending that 'Children unlearned in the social uses of poetry' have not had their 'natural sense of rhythm […] destroyed by the metronome of school-room prosody' (p. iii). Of course, Theodore Roethke and Robert Graves aren't the only poets who find value in the nursery rhyme, folk poem, and their anonymous authors. In *Knock at a Star*, a popular anthology of children poetry, X. J. and Dorothy Kennedy aver, 'After Shakespeare, Anonymous may be the second best poet in our language. At least, he or she wrote more good poems than most poets who sign what they write'.[38] (Minus the bit about Shakespeare, this is position Graves believes children largely share, declaring, again in *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*, that children 'are not bothered by questions of authorship, date, or text' [p. iii].) In 'Mother Goose', Maurice Sendak spends ten pages extolling the rude virtues of anonymous folk poetry, but at one point he turns to his old collaborator, Robert Graves (Sendak illustrated his *Big Green Book*), to drive the point home: 'Robert Graves claims the best of the older [Mother Goose rhymes] are nearer to poetry than the greater part of *The Oxford Book of English Verse*'.[39] Graves ties together his appreciation of the folk tradition, the nursery rhyme, nonsense, its child audience, and the affinity he and Roethke share for Romanticism in *Poetic Unreason*, where he assures, 'Romanticism […] has long been banished to the nursery', for 'the nursery is the one place where there is an audience not too sophisticated to appreciate ancient myths and so-called nonsense rhymes of greater or lesser antiquity'.[40]

The Penny Fiddle begins with its title poem ('The Penny Fiddle'), and it operates, as first poems often do, as an articulation of the book's aesthetic sensibility. More, it dramatizes the poetic enterprise. It concerns itself not with the writing of any particular poem, but rather with how readers transform poems into poetry, a mystery that confounds adults (even literary critics) as often as it does children:

Yesterday I bought a penny fiddle
And put it to my chin to play,
But I found that the strings were painted,
So I threw my fiddle away.

The poem's eponymous fiddle is a small thing, a cheap thing (I recall Charles Bernstein once saying that poetry is the rare kind of text that devalues the paper on which it's printed: a leaf of paper has *some* value, but print a poem on it and it's ruined). So, is the fiddle a metaphor for poetry? In a way. As Joseph explains in 'Poetic Nonsense: Robert Graves, The White Goddess and Children's Poetry', the 'poem enacts a transvaluation in which the materially worthless thing is also, simultaneously, the sacred. Like the penny fiddle, a children's poem can be both the medium of true, ethereal music and still only a toy'[41] (p. 667). It is, Joseph later clarifies, 'the materially valueless thing from which absolute value flows' (p. 675). However, it is only of value in the right hands: the poem becomes poetry when it meets a reader, one with a poetic predisposition. This fact is dramatized when 'A gipsy girl found my penny fiddle | As it lay abandoned there'; she asks, 'if she might keep it', and immediately:

Drew such music from the fiddle
With the help of a farthing bow,
That I offered five shillings for the secret.
But, alas, she would not let it go.

The poetry, really, lies in the music made *using* the fiddle, the experience that comes from reading a poem well. Unread, a poem is nothing. Or nothing more than a penny fiddle gathering dust in an old shop. However, reading alone does not transform it into something of value. The boy looks it over, is turned off by its painted strings, never seeks to draw music from them with its bow. It takes more than reading a poem to make it poetry: one must read it well.

In *Poetic Unreason*, Graves articulates what, to him, makes for a good reader of poetry, one like our gypsy girl. In this passage, he argues that 'a well-chosen anthology should be [like] a medicine chest', but he insists that 'no medicine and no poetry can ever be effective without the consent and co-operation of the patient' (p. 2). The poem cannot do all the work: it needs a sympathetic reader. As early as 1916, we have indications that this is Graves's view of poetry. In '"Allie" and the Lost War', Joseph points to a letter Graves wrote to Edward Marsh in which he writes, 'I've been reading [Walter de la Mare's] *Peacock Pie* again and it improves every time'. The text is unchanged, but what Graves brings to it has. Joseph reads Graves to be implying, '*Peacock Pie* isn't terrible, once one begins to read one's own meanings into it' ('Allie', p. 254). *Peacock Pie*, like the penny fiddle, becomes something more thanks to Graves's farthing bow, his open and generative manner of reading that *makes* meaning more than *finds* it.

Roethke's *I Am!* opens with nonsense, poems designed to be read in the sympathetic gypsy girl way. Nonsense, as Michael Heyman explains, is a variety of poetry 'that deals with indeterminacy and multiplicity of meaning',[42] for, he continues a bit later, 'The genre of nonsense operates primarily by simultaneously transmitting meaning(s) and lack of meaning' (p. 190). He points us to Wim Tigges's characterisation of the nonsense genre, one in which 'the seeming presence of one or more "sensible" meanings is kept in balance by a simultaneous absence of such a meaning'.[43] Consider, then, the opening to 'Dirty Dinky', another poem in the 'Nonsense' section of *I Am!*:

> It's windy there, and rather weird,
> And when you think the sky has cleared
>   – Why, there is Dirty Dinky.

Dinky serves as a kind of personification of the poetic sensibility as exemplified by nonsense: we delight in the strange idea of 'weather' inside a beard, be it windy or not, but when we 'think the sky has cleared', we realise that we've only *thought* it so: there

is Dirty Dinky! The sky hasn't cleared (or maybe it has); it depends on how we *think*. Yet no matter, Dinky is there whether we think we've cleared things up, made things mean, or not. This would seem to contradict Graves and his music-summoning gypsy girl: the poem's meaning is forever deferred, the poetry a nut we can't quite crack no matter the things we've *thunk*. Yet in nonsense 'more "sensible" meanings [are] kept in balance by a simultaneous absence of such meaning', as Tigges has it. Besides, there is more to this story, for the poem concludes,

> You'd better watch the things you do,
> You'd better watch the things you do.
> You're part of him; he's part of you
> – *You* may be Dirty Dinky

The bets are still hedged (we only *may* be Dirty Dinky, even as we're part of him and he of us), yet the possibility is there. We might very well be the narrator of 'The Penny Fiddle', ready to cast away a piece of verse (or penny fiddle) because it's cheap, its strings painted and practically worthless – or we might be the gipsy girl who takes the poem to chin and draws our farthing bow across those weird, painted strings, coaxing poetry from it. We may find that it isn't so terrible once one begins to read one's own meanings into it.

Graves makes clear his affinity for nonsense in *Poetic Unreason*, not only where he remarks that nonsense has found its way to children likely because 'the nursery is the one place where there is an audience not too sophisticated to appreciate ancient myths and so-called nonsense rhymes of greater or lesser antiquity' (p. 126), but also in his generous appraisal of Edward Lear, particularly his 'Dong with a Luminous Nose'. Graves insists that 'though there may not be found a Classical Scholar to admit it', the poem's protagonist is 'essentially as tragic a figure as Cadmus of the Greek legend seeking his lost Europa, even a more painful one' (p. 24). Continuing, he notes that it is 'strange that Lear is treated less seriously' than other great poets, asking, 'who will say that

the foolery in Edward Lear is less worthy of our tragic imagination than the terrible foolery at the crisis of King Lear'? (p. 24). One wonders what he would have made of Roethke's 'Dirty Dinky', the meanings he might have made with 'The Monotony Song', also in *I Am!* Which begins,

> A donkey's tail is very nice
> You mustn't pull it more than twice,
> Now that's a piece of good advice
> – Heigho, meet Hugh and Harry!

Here is another poem about death (and life – and the things we do between the two). Advice on how much one can safely irritate a donkey doesn't apply when Hugh meets an otherwise gracious, talking bear. Hugh is quickly dispatched by said bear for calling attention to its tendency to shed: 'Old Boy, you're shedding hair, | And shedding more than here and there'. Our Bearish Roethke was no fan of critics, and neither is his poetic bear, who responds civilly at first, but eventually breaks the poem's form (or at least bends it) by substituting a 'Grrrr'! for a rhyming 'fur'. (Neither rhyme exactly with *far* or *are*, but *Grrrr* rhymes with the missing *fur*, whose absence echoes the soon-to-be-absent *Hugh*, leaving us, as we'll see, with nothing but *Harry* and the hair of our hairy bear, who doesn't shed both here and there but somehow sheds *more than* here *and* there: nonsense!) Which is to say, the bear mauls poor Hugh into the next world:

> Sir, you go too far,
> I wonder who you think you are
> To make remarks about my—Grrrr!
> – And there was only Harry!

Harry himself is soon to die. At first it seems he dies from running up a wall that – like Hugh, like the word *fur* – isn't there (or here):

> This Harry ran straight up a wall,
> But found he wasn't there at all,
> And so he had a horrid fall.
> – Alas, alack for Harry!

But the line doesn't read, 'But found *it* wasn't there at all'. Instead, Harry has a fall because *he* wasn't there. Is the antecedent of the 'he' an anthropomorphised, oddly male wall? (It could be – an earlier piece in 'Nonsense Poems' anthropomorphises a ceiling, after all.) But perhaps not. Or perhaps Harry was gone before he arrived. Or maybe Harry simply wasn't where the wall was (despite the first line in the stanza insisting that he ran straight up one). The meaning is summoned even as it slips away, much like the wall, like the word *fur*, like both Hugh and Harry. The nonsense moral is simple, if rather dark, and couched in uncertainty (*I guess*, *sometimes*, *unless*):

> The moral is, I guess you keep
> Yourself awake until you sleep,
> And sometimes look before you leap
> – Unless you're Hugh or Harry!

We're taken back to 'Dinky', or at least I am, for I find myself chanting and dancing in that ursine, Roethkeish way: 'you'd better watch the things you do; you're part of them; they're part of you – *you* may be Hugh or Harry'.

Throughout *The Penny Fiddle*, poetry and song and the transformative power of both is evident. With 'Dicky', for instance, Graves offers a gloomy ghost story cast as a loose ballad. The rhyme scheme varies – sometimes *abcb*, other times *abab* – as does the meter, but with that variation comes its folksy feel, the sense it is an old country song rudely made for those who, as Graves writes, have not had their 'natural sense of rhythm […] destroyed by the metronome of school-room prosody' (*The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*, p. iii). Our eponymous hero encounters a ghost with a 'lean, lolling jaw', wearing

Garments old and musty,
Of antique cut,
His body very frail and bony,
His eyes tight shut.

What is crucial, however, is how this strange creature (‘His face was clay […] | His beard, cobwebs’) comes to be. Yes, he’s a product of language, summoned by the very poem we read, but within the world of the poem he is also made by poetry, or, again, summoned by it, his appearance prefaced by Dicky playing childhood games (‘Twirling my stick’) while he sings ‘old country songs’. The ghost materialises in the very next stanza. Likewise, ‘Lift-Boy’ begins, ‘Let me tell you a story of how I began’, foregrounding the fact that this tale is a performance made of language (and one that, like Graves’s medicine chest in *Poetic Unreason*, depends upon ‘the consent and co-operation of the patient’ [p. 2]: *let me* tell you a story). The poem ‘What Did I Dream’ speaks of ‘The finest entertainment known’: dreams – if only the waking mind can somehow recapture them, keep ‘The fragments’ from ‘fly[ing] like chaff’, if only we can capture them, say, in verse. In ‘Jock o’Binnorie’ we meet a king’s ‘fool called Leery’, who tells ‘nine hundred tales | And found no others to tell’, yet when he ‘started from the first once more’, the king ‘knew it well’. Was his highness angry? No, for:

‘Old friends are best, dear Fool’, he cried,
 ‘And old yarns heard again.
You may tell me the story of Jock o’ Binnorie
 Every night of my reign!’

These old yarns belong in the storehouse of traditional folktales: ‘old friends’ Graves knew and loved, whether cast in verse or prose. And, of course, there’s ‘Allie’. Joseph has given us an entire essay on this four-stanza, thirty-six-line poem: ‘“Allie” and the Lost War’, to which I’ve earlier referred. ‘At first glance’, he proposes, ‘Allie’ is a children’s poem; it ‘seems unambiguously

an ode to lost childhood, and a variation on the ancient theme Northrop Frye calls the "Framework of all literature"' (p. 252): 'how man once lived in a Golden Age, […] how that world was lost, and how we someday may be able to get it back again'.[44] However, Joseph recommends, take a closer, second look at the poem, published in *Country Sentiment* (1920) only two years after the close of World War I, and it transforms into a war poem, or rather, he contends cheekily, it becomes 'a poem that is and is not a war poem, and is and is not a children's poem' (p. 264). I advise a third look (or maybe squint your eyes and give it a first look yet again), for read here, not at the close of WWI but at the end of this essay; read here, not only in the context of Graves's work, but alongside Roethke's *I Am!*; read here, not in *Country Sentiment* but set in the pages of *The Penny Fiddle* (subtitled: *Poems for Children*) where it immediately follows the *ars poetica* that is its title poem; read here with a touch of joyous foolery and so-called nonsense, and Allie's call becomes a spell inside a children's poem:

> Allie, call the birds in,
>   The birds from the sky.
> Allie calls, Allie sings
> […]
>
> Allie, call the beasts in,
>   The beasts, every one.
> Allie calls, Allie sings
> […]
>
> Allie, call the fish up,
>   The fish from the stream.
> Allie calls, Allie sings
> […]
>
> Allie, call the children,
>   Children from the green.
> Allie calls, Allie sings.

Here we have another poem about poetry. Allie does not make music with a penny fiddle, but draws it from within herself. Allie calls. Allie sings. Remember the gypsy girl: there, the poetry was the music she coaxed from the fiddle. Allie's poetry, too, is the music she draws from her instrument, but in this case the instrument is her own body. Furthermore, the music is tied to language. A young Orpheus, Allie makes poetry, and that poetry reorders the world. This is an obvious point with which to end, so I may as well compound it with the coincidence that *The Penny Fiddle* precedes Roethke's *I Am!* by only a year. If one were inclined to read one's own meanings into that coincidence, one could argue that *The Penny Fiddle* performs the overture to *I Am!* More, one could decide that Allie *sings* Roethke's *I Am!* into being. In her poem, Allie conjures the menagerie of creatures that populate both Roethke's nonsense and greenhouse poems, and she does so by name: both share lambs, cows, minnows, and eels, and while no trout or goldfish, nor doves, hens, or robins appear in Roethke's book, the more generic fish and bird certainly do. And among Roethke's nonsense poems we even find 'A Boy who had Gumption and Push | [who] Would frequently Talk to a Bush'. I mention Roethke's Boy only because he's a curious, Roethkeish version of Allie. Unlike Allie, who 'call[s] the beasts in, | The beasts, every one', our Boy communes with the vegetative world, no animals, but a bush and a bush alone; still,

> Nobody Sniggered and Mocked
> As Those Two quietly Talked,
> Because Nobody Heard,
> Not a Beast, Not a Bird, –
> So they Talked and they Talked and they Talked.

Again, this is joyous foolery and nonsense. Like Graves and Roethke, however, I mean it seriously. Like Allie, I fashioned this essay as a call, as an occasion to summon Roethke and Graves from their rest, to place them on a nice beach in Mallorca and watch them 'play by the water's edge | Till the April sun set', to imagine

what we might hear should we listen in on them as they (like the Boy and the bush) Talk and they Talk and they Talk. We can never know, of course, what Graves would think of *I Am!*, the meanings he might make of it. And Roethke, too, has left us without commentary on *The Penny Fiddle*. However, we owe it to both Graves and Roethke, who spent so much of their lives bearishly devoted to thinking and thinking hard about nonsense, nursery rhymes, and children's poetry, to attend to theirs. If we can't overhear them talking, perhaps we should, like a kinder Zeus, place their collections in the night sky alongside the other fine books that form, point by point, the constellations of their poetic output.[45] Then, when we tilt our muzzles to the heavens and transform the starry field of their work into an image, every star will be accounted for. *The Penny Fiddle* and *I Am! Says the Lamb* may never be their constellations' brightest stars, but they are central, nonetheless. The images we make without them are less interesting for their absence, hobbled by incompleteness. So, fix them in the firmament, step back, and take a look. Then tell us what you see.

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NOTES

[1] Robert Graves, *The Penny Fiddle* (London: Cassell, 1960).
[2] Theodore Roethke, *I Am! Says the Lamb: A Joyous Book of Sense and Nonsense* (New York: Doubleday, 1961)
[3] Unlike Graves, who in *The Penny Fiddle* sat poems he had written for adults beside those he had written for children, Roethke divided *I Am! Says the Lamb* into two sections: the first, 'The Nonsense Poems' (with twenty-two poems), consisted of poems written with a child audience in

mind, and the second, ‘The Greenhouse Poems’ (with twenty), comprised poems originally published in collections for adults. ‘The Heron’, ‘The Bat’, and ‘Vernal Sentiment’, for instance, originally appeared in *Open House* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1941). The heart of ‘The Greenhouse Poems’ comes from *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (Garden City: Doubleday,1948), where fifteen pieces first appeared: ‘My Papa’s Waltz’, his two ‘Cuttings’ poems, ‘Root Cellar’, ‘Forcing House’, ‘Weed Puller’, ‘Orchids’, ‘Moss-Gathering’, ‘Big Wind’, ‘Old Florist’, ‘Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt, and Frau Schwartze’, ‘Transplanting’, ‘Child on Top of a Greenhouse’, ‘Flower Dump’, and ‘Carnations’. The most recent poem in the section (‘Snake’) was taken from *Words for the Wind* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958). In an essay he prepared for the *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* (London), Roethke comments on the children’s poems represented in *Words for the Wind*, explaining:

> Then by way of contrast [to the love poems early in the collection], there is a handful of light pieces and poems for children. These are rougher than what most children’s editors prefer. The attempt – part of a larger effort – was to make poems which please both child and parent, without insulting the intelligence or taste of either.

Theodore Roethke, ‘Theodore Roethke Writes’, in *On Poetry and Craft: Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke* (New York: Copper Canyon, 2001), p. 32.

The majority of ‘The Nonsense Poems’ are original to *I Am! Says the Lamb*. Those seventeen poems represent the book in *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (New York: Doubleday, 1966). The rest in the section are sourced from *Words for the Wind*, which contains the interlude Roethke points to above. Titled ‘Lighter Pieces and Poems for Children’, it includes ‘Dinky’, ‘The Cow’, ‘The Serpent’, ‘The Sloth’, and ‘The Lady and the Bear’.

[4] See Robert Graves, *The Complete Poems of Robert Graves*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward, 3 vols (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995-1999).

[5] Allan Seager, *The Glass House: The Life of Theodore Roethke* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), pp. 251-52.

[6] Wolfgang Saxon, 'Robert Graves, Poet and Scholar, Dies at 90', *New York Times*, 8 December 1985, section 1, pp. 1, 48 (p. 1).
[7] Joshua Hammer, 'Robert Graves Found "Perfect Tranquillity" in Majorca', *The New York Times*, 3 July 2015 <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/travel/robert-graves-found-perfect-tranquillity-in-majorca.html> [Accessed 7 April 2021]
[8] Theodore Roethke, *Words for the Wind: The Collected Verse* (New York Doubleday, 1958).
[9] Theodore Roethke, *Selected Letters,* ed. by Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 218.
[10] Roethke, "How to Write like Somebody Else', in *On Poetry and Craft*, p. 55.
[11] Roethke's definition here is likely a quotation from Auden, who in the introduction to *The Poet's Tongue: An Anthology, Chosen by W. H. Auden and John Garrett* (London: Bell, 1935), writes, 'Of the many definitions of poetry, the simplest is still the best: 'memorable speech"' (p. 5). Thanks to Neil Philip for reminding me of this fact, and for pointing out that although both Auden and Garrett signed the introduction, Edward Mendelson reprints it as by Auden alone in *The English Auden* (where the quotation can be found on p. 327).
[12] Roethke, *Selected Letters,* p. 242.
[13] Seager, p. 245. For more on Roethke's views on teaching (and, specifically, the teaching of poetry), check out 'The Teaching Poet', a short pedagogical essay Roethke prepared for *Poetry*, 79.5 (1952), pp. 250-55 magazine. It was published in 1952, nine years before *I Am!* For more on 'The Teaching Poet' and Roethke's pedagogy, see my 'A Few Thousand Words on Theodore Roethke, Children's Poetry, and Three Poems Concerning Two Turtles (one of Whom Is Named Myrtle)' in *A Field Guide to the Poetry of Theodore Roethke,* ed. by William Barillas (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 2020), pp. 213-21.
[14] Theodore Roethke, *The Waking: Poems 1933-1953* (New York: Doubleday, 1953).
[15] Robert Graves, *The Big Green Book* (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1962). Coincidentally, Untermeyer was one half of the committee that awarded Theodore Roethke the Pulitzer in 1954 (Alfred Kreymborg was the other).
[16] Lissa Paul, 'Literacy', in *Keywords for Children's Literature,* ed. by Lissa Paul and Philip Nel (New York: NYU Press, 2011), p. 144.

[17] Michael Joseph, '"Orphans of Poetry"': The Poetry of Childhood and the Poetry for Children of Robert Graves', *Book 2.0.,* 6 (2016), p. 10.
[18] My own interest in Graves's children's poetry was inspired by Joseph's 2017 Visiting Scholar's Lecture at San Diego State University, 'How to Do Things with Poems', an hour lecture analysing Robert Graves's 'The Magical Picture' and 'Hide and Seek' (the former written when Graves was 26, the latter when he was 73).
[19] Michael Joseph, '*The Penny Fiddle* and Poetic Truth: The Children's Poems of Robert Graves', in *Poetry and Childhood*, ed. by Morag Styles, Louise Joy, David Whitley (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2010), pp. 81-89.
[20] Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Robert Graves: From Great War Poet to* Good-Bye to All That *1895-1929* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). The quotation here – Graves writing to Edmund Gosse on 25 March 1917 – refers to the early sixteenth-century poet John Skelton. Wilson notes that Graves 'had enjoyed his 'peculiar quality of joyous foolery"', a quality, she adds, 'that he had also recognized in English nursery rhymes' (p. 186).
[21] Robert Graves, *Country Sentiment* (London: Heinemann, 1920).
[22] Robert Graves, 'A First Review', *The Complete Poems in One Volume*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 100.
[23] Interestingly, Wilson does mention Graves's desire to have some of his ballads and nursery rhymes set to music, explaining that the project 'petered out' when Welsh composer '[Ivor] Novello lost interest'. The project was called *The Penny Fiddle*, and, she adds, it 'would not be published until 1960' (p. 224). Given how their marriage turned out, it seems nursery rhymes were much more than a 'private world' he shared with Nicholson, that his interest in them was a sustained preoccupation and Wilson's claim that 'it was to please [Nicholson], by supplying her with texts for illustration, that he had focused more on "nursery stuff"' is an oversimplification (p. 244).
[24] *The Cambridge History of American Poetry,* ed. by Alfred Bendixen and Stephanie Burt (New York Cambridge University Press, 2015). My contribution to the volume, 'Modern and Contemporary Children's Poetry' discusses Roethke's work as a children's poet, covering (albeit briefly) *I Am! Says the Lamb* (1961), *Party at the Zoo* (1963), and his lone posthumous collection of children's poetry, *Dirty Dinky and Other Creatures* (1973) chapter that substantially treats him and his work,

Roethke shares the spotlight: David Wojahn's '"All the Blessings of this Consuming Chance": Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke, and the Middle-Generation Poets'.
[25] *A Field Guide to the Poetry of Theodore Roethke,* ed. by William David Barillas and Edward Hirsch (Athens, OH: Swallow Press / Ohio University Press, 2021).
[26] Roethke, *Complete Poems*. As a result, neither *Party at the Zoo* (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1963) nor *Dirty Dinky and Other Creatures* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973) have sections devoted to them in *A Field Guide*. However, none of the other contributors occasion to mention either book and (I regret to say) even I fail to mention both (although I did follow protocol by corralling my single reference to *Zoo* within an endnote. My essay is the sole piece exploring the poems in *I Am!* and is called 'A Few Thousand Words on Theodore Roethke, Children's Poetry, and Three Poems Concerning Two Turtles (One of Whom Is Named Myrtle)', pp. 213-21.
[27] For those inclined to read that work, check out Joseph T. Thomas Jr., 'Street Cries', in *Poetry's Playground: The Culture of Contemporary American Children's Poetry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), pp. 61-84, where Roethke shares the spotlight with another poet whose children's poetry is largely neglected: John Ciardi.
[28] Randall Jarrell, 'Fifty Years of American Poetry', in *The Third Book of Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 326.
[29] Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 335.
[30] Hamilton adds:

> When [Lowell] first met Roethke, Lowell was full of his own bear jokes and thought it delightful that there should be a bear-poet more shaggy and ungainly than himself. For a period he addressed Roethke in letters as 'Dear Bear'. (p. 335)

[31] Robert Graves, *Collected Poems 1914-1947* (London: Cassell, 1947).
[32] Randall Jarrell, *The Bat-Poet* (New York: HarperCollins, 1964).
[33] Jerome Griswold, *The Children's Books of Randall Jarrell* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 57-58.
[34] Theony Condos, 'The Katasterismoi (Part 1)', *Astronomical Society of the Pacific Leaflets*, 10 (1970), 362-63.

[35] Joseph, '*The Penny Fiddle* and Poetic Truth: The Children's Poems of Robert Graves', p. 88.
[36] Michael Joseph, '"Allie"' and the Lost War', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 41 (2017), 250-268, p. 259.
[37] Robert Graves, *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes* (London: Benn, 1927).
[38] *Knock at a Star: A Child's Introduction to Poetry,* ed. by X. J. Kennedy, Dorothy M. Kennedy, Karen Lee Baker (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 6.
[39] Maurice Sendak, 'Mother Goose', in *Caldecott & Co.: Notes on Books and Pictures* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988), p. 13. Here Sendak is quoting him word for word, despite the indication that he's paraphrasing. Graves writes, 'the best of the older ones are nearer to poetry than the greater part of the "Oxford Book of English Verse"' (p. iii).
[40] Robert Graves, *Poetic Unreason* (London: Palmer, 1925), p. 126.
[41] Michael Joseph, 'Poetic Nonsense: Robert Graves, The White Goddess and Children's Poetry', *Gravesiana: The Journal of the Robert Graves Society*, 3 (2013), 667.
[42] Michael Heyman, 'A New Defense of Nonsense; or, Where Then Is his Phallus? and Other Questions Not to Ask', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly,* 24 (1999), 188.
[43] Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), pp. 255-56.
[44] Joseph quotes Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1964), p. 20.
[45] Indeed, perhaps it's time to create a collection of all Roethke's children's poems, time for a compilation of Graves's children's poetry to join those of his war poems and love poems.