

# **A Brief Foray into Nonsense by Way of Robert Graves's *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children***

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**Abstract:** Inflected by the theoretical insights of Wim Tigges, this essay explores the nonsensical elements of Robert Graves's *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children*, focusing primarily on 'Dicky', 'Vain and Careless', and 'The Six Badgers'.

**Keywords:** literary nonsense; children's poetry; children's literature; nursery rhyme; Wim Tigges

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When the word nonsense burst onto the linguistic scene in the seventeenth century, it tended to refer either to 'meaningless words or ideas' or to 'a trivial or worthless thing', only slowly coming to denote that peculiar literary mode we have come to call 'literary nonsense'.<sup>1</sup> This trinity of significations (meaninglessness, worthlessness, and literary nonsense) doubtlessly fascinated Robert Graves, for, in addition to maintaining a career-long interest in 'poetic unreason',<sup>2</sup> Graves was also intrigued by the seemingly worthless thing – a penny fiddle, say – or even, as Michael Joseph puts it, 'an apparently trite, didactic, cast-off children's rhyme'.<sup>3</sup>

For those outside the poetry world, poetry is famously disliked ('I too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle', Marianne Moore agrees), yet poetry written for children (often belittled as 'children's verse')<sup>4</sup> is often dismissed even by those within the poetry world. Surprisingly, even scholars of children's literature tend to relegate poetry for young people to the margins of their discourse, should it be discussed at all.<sup>5</sup> Not so for Robert Graves. His interest in that which seems worthless resonates both with his abiding interest in childhood and his belief

that poetry, again in the words of Joseph, ‘enacts a transvaluation in which the materially worthless thing is also, simultaneously, the sacred’. This transvaluation, Joseph avers, is at the heart of Graves’s conviction that ‘[l]ike the penny fiddle, a children’s poem can be both the medium of true, ethereal music and still only a toy’.<sup>6</sup> That is, for Graves, it is ‘the materially valueless thing from which absolute value flows’.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, one could argue that there is effectively nothing more important than ‘all this fiddle’, even when we talk about penny fiddles. And, especially when we talk about Robert Graves’s 1960 collection of poetry, *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children*.

In *The Penny Fiddle*, Graves employs a purposely archaic poetic idiom – via diction and a self-consciously modulated ‘rough’ and ‘sketchy’ meter – that speaks to its child readers of topics that might alarm even twenty-first-century audiences. Among these topics, we find hopelessness (in the poem ‘Love without Hope’), heartbreak (in ‘The Hills of May’ and ‘One Hard Look’), death and drunkenness (‘How and Why’), fabulous monsters (‘In the Wilderness’ and ‘The Bedpost’), and even class conflict (‘Lift-boy’). ‘Lift-boy’ is an especially interesting case when it comes to this topic, much more in line with traditional nursery rhyme than with the majority of the sweetly arcadian children’s poems published in the mid-century. ‘Lift-boy’ is ultimately a darkly comic meditation on murder / suicide, a dramatization of a youth’s response to the revelation that he lives in a world where ‘[n]ot a soul shall be savéd’ (to rhyme with ‘David’), for ‘[t]he whole First Creation shall forfeit salvation’. (Spoiler alert: the poem’s protagonist responds to this fact by killing himself and the gentleman who laid the unhappy news on him. Yes, in a children’s poem.)<sup>8</sup>

Graves also offers his young readers an eerie ghost poem, ‘Dicky’, which takes the form of a dialogue between mother and son. Despite its unassuming title, ‘Dicky’ is something of a grotesquery. At the heart of the rudely crafted phantasmagoria, moulders an eldritch revenant with a ‘lean, lolling jaw [...] | garments old and musty’, and a ‘spreading beard’ of ‘cobwebs’. ‘Dicky’ begins with our eponymous young hero singing ‘old country songs’ when, while

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‘passing | The Churchyard gate’, he’s ‘stopped’ by ‘[a]n old man’ who censures him for ‘walking late’. Dicky reports:

I did not know the man,  
I grew afeared  
At his lean, lolling jaw,  
His spreading beard.

His garments old and musty,  
Of antique cut,  
His body very lean and bony,  
His eyes tight shut.

Oh, even to tell it now  
My courage ebbs ...  
His face was clay, Mother,  
His beard, cobwebs.

In that long horrid pause  
‘Good-night’, he said,  
Entered and clicked the gate:  
‘Each to his bed’.<sup>9</sup>

The grotesque imagery is as apparent as its archaic tone – both reminiscent of the folk tale and nursery rhyme. These qualities are found throughout *Penny Fiddle*, and they are resonant with literary nonsense.

Literary nonsense had existed well before we arrived at a tidy term for it; as Michael Heyman and Kevin Shortsleeve remind us, we can find literary nonsense within the medieval carnivalesque tradition Mikhail Bakhtin explores in *Rabelais and His World*: ‘a “grotesque” genre of “absurd compositions” that revel in “linguistic freedom”, illogical sequences, and the “inside out”’.<sup>10</sup> According to Heyman and Shortsleeve, ‘[o]ver several hundred years, variant meanings of *grotesque*’ emerged, including ‘rugged’, ‘unpolished’, ‘distorted’, ‘irregular’, ‘fantastically extravagant’, and ‘bizarre’.

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Simultaneously, the grotesque was used to characterize texts ‘considered quaint or immaterial, ludicrous or fantastically absurd, and by 1822, “very amusing”. Reflecting these varied meanings, *grotesque* [quickly] became the favored term for literary nonsense as it grew in popularity in Victorian England’.<sup>11</sup> Heyman and Shortsleeve also note that in *The Poetry of Nonsense*, published in 1925, Emile Cammaerts uses ‘*grotesque* almost interchangeably with the word *nonsense* to describe the rough, childlike, sketchy, or exaggerated’.<sup>12</sup>

Other varieties of the grotesque – those playfully absurd and illogically topsy-turvy compositions gestured to above – are also prominent in *The Penny Fiddle*. Take ‘Vain and Careless’, for instance, a piece that brings us closer to our contemporary understanding of literary nonsense. Like ‘Dicky’, ‘Vain and Careless’ also recalls the nursery rhyme, both in form and content. Initially, it struck me as belonging to the same poetic species as the well-known nursery rhyme, ‘Jack Sprat’:

Jack Sprat could eat no fat.  
His wife could eat no lean.  
But, together both,  
They licked the platter clean.

Of course, both poems concern ‘ill-matched pairs’ (one of the many subjects Wim Tigges argues that nursery rhymes share with nonsense).<sup>13</sup> However, ‘Vain and Careless’ turns out to be quite another type entirely. At first blush, it appears to be one of those ‘apparently trite, didactic, cast-off children’s rhyme[s]’ Michael Joseph refers to above. After describing Mr Vain and Miss Careless, it ends with this seemingly straightforward articulation of an overt moral:

This gentle-born couple  
Lived and died apart –  
Water will not mix with oil,  
Nor vain with careless heart.<sup>14</sup>

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But there is more to the poem than that. Where the poem succeeds is where the nonsense lies. It may not be ‘pure’ nonsense as characterised by Tigges, but it is nonsense. Before I explore it – along with ‘The Six Badgers’, the purest nonsense in the book – allow me a few moments on Tigges.

Although one finds in *The Penny Fiddle* very few examples of what Tigges would call ‘pure’ literary nonsense, one does chance upon the kind of folksy, antique verse that typifies ‘Dicky’ and ‘Vain and Careless’: verse suggestive of the nursery. While Tigges tends to distance nursery rhyme from ‘pure’ nonsense, he grants that it ‘seems to represent an early stage of nonsense writing’,<sup>15</sup> adding that ‘many old poems [identified as nursery rhymes] “lost” the sense they may originally have conveyed and came to be relegated to the nursery [...] simply because of their “musical” effects’ (p. 9). In his characterization of ‘pure’ nonsense, Tigges builds on the insights afforded by Elizabeth Sewell’s 1952 study *The Field of Nonsense*, in which she argues that literary nonsense is marked by the productive tension between sense and its contrary: non-sense. For Tigges, literary nonsense presents ‘the seeming presence of one or more “sensible” meanings [...] kept in balance by a simultaneous absence of such a meaning’. That is, for Tigges, literary nonsense exists on a spectrum with perfect sense on one end, and absolute gibberish on the other, ‘purest’ variety of nonsense burbling happily at the point between. (p. 255). Nonsense, then, requires the push and pull of these two poles, non-sense and sense. The quintessence of literary nonsense is found in the tension created by playfully indeterminate over-abundance (or lack) of meaning balanced with a sense of order, design, semiotic satisfaction, and clear teleology. Without that sense of sense, countered neatly with the non-sensical, one approaches something akin to the complexity of Dada on one end and simple light verse on the other. This need for sense and design explains why so much literary nonsense is disciplined with meter, rhyme, and other formal techniques of poetry. Similarly, it explains why writers of literary nonsense tend to avoid prose, as its formal designs are less obvious. Rather, they prefer the more

conspicuous formal devices afforded by nonsense verse (or, minus the sneer, nonsense poetry).

So, back to 'Vain and Careless'. Its title initially reads as a double descriptor of one person, both vain and careless. However, the title actually describes the 'gentle-born couple' of the final stanza, one of Tigges's 'ill-matched pairs' that, besides being called 'a couple' is decidedly not a couple, at least not in the amorous sense, as we discover they '[l]ived and died apart'. Their neighbours, however, believe they should be a couple: they 'saw it plain', '[a] splendid match surely'. Why, exactly? Who knows? Here sense butts against non-sense; here we see meaning counterpoised by the lack of meaning.

Graves casts the poem as a loose ballad: rustic and unpolished in its meter almost to the point of transforming into accentual verse. Each quatrain rhymes ABCB, the lines tending to four, three, four, and then three stresses. Graves has a predilection for these loose, almost accentual folk rhythms in his children's rhymes: the meter rugged, unpolished, and irregular, even as the subject wrought in that meter is fantastically extravagant and bizarre. In his forward to *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*, Graves testifies to his affection for the accentual, folk rhythms of the nursery rhyme, explaining that '[c]hildren unlearned in the social uses of poetry' have not had their 'natural sense of rhythm [...] destroyed by the metronome of school-room prosody' (and the meter in 'Vain and Careless', free from the clockwork regularity of the metronome, clearly evinces Graves's own 'natural sense of rhythm'). He continues, insisting that 'the best of the older [nursery rhymes] are nearer to poetry than the greater part of *The Oxford Book of English Verse*',<sup>16</sup> a preference he anticipates in his monograph *Poetic Unreason*. He writes, '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'.<sup>17</sup>

Counter-intuitively (for Tigges's pure nonsense tends to be metrically exact), the looser meter of 'Vain and Careless' adds to its nonsense, giving it that lived-in aura of common-sense, that sure, comfortably teleological feel necessary for nonsense. It seems like sense, but push only a bit, and the sense crumbles. Mr Vain is so vainglorious

that he ‘walk[s] on stilts | To be seen by the crowd’. Yet the crowd loves him: ‘all the people ran about | Shouting till he passed’. Any didactic poem worth its salt would condemn the man for his vanity. And, sure, while the universe punishes him by vexing his ‘splendid match’ (just as Careless is evidently doomed to live her life ‘play[ing] bobcherry’ without ‘the vain man [who] went by her, | Aloft in the air’), we are forced to wonder at the poem’s nonsensical moral: both seem happy; neither pursues a mate; only the neighbours seem to want them together; so again we are forced to wonder: who cares? The poem, then, works as a poem by virtue of its music, its absurd images and illogical sequences, its summoning of didacticism only to wave it away. The poem begins with Careless giving away her baby. (Where did she get a baby? Surely, our vain, stilt-wearing hero is not the father. And if not, are we meant to believe he would find a single mother his ideal mate?):

Lady, lovely lady,  
 Careless and gay!  
 Once, when a beggar called,  
 She gave her child away. (p. 37)

As one does, the ‘[b]eggar took the baby, | Wrapped it in a shawl’. But our ostensibly careless heroine is perhaps not so careless after all, for she admonishes him: ‘Bring him back [...] | Next time you call!’ Here we have something akin to what Tigges calls ‘the popular type of irrational nonsense found in nursery rhymes, topsy-turvy tales and similar ancient samples of inconsequentiality’ (p. 85), and it is in images like this – the sight of our careless and gay heroine happily giving away her baby as blithely as she would direction to the town’s millinery – that we find the poem’s nonsense, and in such images lies the poem’s considerable charm.

As I explain in a recent essay,<sup>18</sup> Graves’s affection for childhood, folk poetry, nursery rhyme, and nonsense runs deep in his poetic practice, whether he writes for children, within the hearing of children, or for the adults those children may grow into. In *Robert Graves: The Lasting Poetic Achievement*, D. N. G Carter calls

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‘typically Gravesian’ the ‘working towards an adult end the language, rhythms, objects and situations characteristic of the nursery’, including, I would add, the nursery’s rhymes. He continues, noting that ‘Graves perceives in the child’s world modes of apprehension dulled in the adult’s, but still important to the poet’.<sup>19</sup>

However, Graves’s interest in writing for children suggests that he is also interested in working ‘the language, rhythms, objects and situations characteristic of the nursery’ towards ends appropriate for a more mysterious construction of childhood than that held by many of his contemporaries, than that held by many of our contemporaries. And one of the ways he achieves this end involves nonsense, that peculiar mode of writing involving the equipoise of sense and nonsense, the rational and the irrational, meaning and non-meaning, poetic reason and unreason. As Carter writes:

In one fundamental sense Graves is a poet of reason: the compact between him and his readers [...] is soundly based upon the principles of logical discourse and the formalities of an accepted syntax. In another sense, however, equally fundamental, he is a poet of ‘unreason’: his subjects are nightmares, terrors, hauntings, pathological states of mind, fugitive areas of consciousness, quite as often as they pertain to matters more normative, within the law. (p. 117)

What Carter describes in this passage is a kind of conceptual nonsense, very much in the vein of Wim Tigges. And this conceptual frame explains Graves’s deep love of literary nonsense, which he articulates 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 ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’. Graves insists that ‘though there may not be found a Classical Scholar to admit it’, Lear’s famous Dong is ‘essentially as tragic a figure as Cadmus of the Greek legend seeking his lost Europa, even a more

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painful one'. Continuing, he notes that it is 'strange that Lear is treated less seriously' than other great poets. In a startling gesture as provocative as it is sincere, Graves places Lear beside Shakespeare in the poetic firmament, 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). Of course, the purposely tensionless agon at the heart of 'Vain and Careless' fails to approach the tragedy of either Shakespeare's *King Lear* or Lear's 'The Dong with the Luminous Nose' – as it should – for the nonsensical effects of 'Vain and Careless' pullulate about this very illusion of conflict. The crisis of the terrible foolery set up by the poem exists only in the minds of its protagonists' neighbours; again, both Careless and Vain seem perfectly happy living and dying apart. And are likely better for it.

With 'The Six Badgers', Graves offers us a taste of pure nonsense, albeit a rather retired example. It concerns the eponymous sextet of badgers, who walk up to one Farmer George (busy at work hoeing his 'lands'), encircle him, bow, and adjure him to '[h]urry home' to dinner. Despite the purported need for haste, the badgers don't run up to him. All told, they seem rather staid, our white-wand-wielding badgers. And, while Farmer George obeys the badgers (who can blame him?), there is no evidence that he drops his hoe and races home. Rather, he simply reports (the poem is a first-person account), '[s]o homeward I went'. However, the farmer is left (again, blamelessly) unable to understand why this unusual crew of talking, bewanded badgers sought him out simply to inform him that his dinner is ready. A fair bit of nonsense, the whole proceeding. Let's hear the story again, this time in verse:

As I was a-hoeing, a-hoeing my lands,  
Six badgers walked up, with white wands in their hands.  
They formed a ring round me and, bowing, they said:  
'Hurry home, Farmer George, for the table is spread!  
There's pie in the oven, there's beef on the plate:  
Hurry home, Farmer George, if you would not be late!  
So homeward went I, but could not understand

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Why six fine dog-badgers with white wands in hand  
Should seek me out hoeing, and bow in a ring,  
And all to inform me so common a thing!<sup>20</sup>

This queer, singular example of pure nonsense is cast in ten lines, oddly broken and asymmetrical.<sup>21</sup> Its initial sextet mirrors its six, wand-wielding badgers – not unlike the ‘[g]rey-headed beadles [...] with wands as white as snow’ of William Blake’s ‘Holy Thursday’ from *Songs of Innocence*. Its concluding quatrain tells of Farmer George’s bemused walk home, leaving the ‘rich and fruitful land’ of Blake’s ‘Holy Thursday’ (this time from *Songs of Experience*) in anticipation of a well-appointed table, a pie in the oven, and beef on the plate, wondering, just like the reader, at the nonsense within the very poem in which he lives: why would six fine dog-badgers with white wands in hand seek him out hoeing, bowing in a ring, all to inform him of so common a thing? Of course, there is no single answer, although there are many, for the poem presents its readers with an over-abundance of meaning. It is worth recalling that, in an essay anticipating *Anatomy of Nonsense*, Tigges stresses that nonsense can be characterised by balancing ‘absence of meaning’ with ‘a *multiplicity* of meaning’ (emphasis mine),<sup>22</sup> a multiplicity evident here: one is tempted to pull out one’s slide rule and protractor, to search one’s *variora* and encyclopaedia of literary symbology for badger and wand and hoe, and get to work.

However, the poem’s concluding question (*why would six dog-badgers seek me out to tell me that dinner’s served?*) is only implied, embedded as it is within a statement. More overt is a decisive articulation of indeterminacy, our narrator insisting that he ‘could not understand’ why these badgers, armed with white wands, would gather about him ‘to inform [him] so common a thing’. We’re encouraged to accept the conclusion’s indeterminacy even as the final exclamation mark (as opposed to an eroteme) deters us from venturing an answer to the implied query by way of some extravagant literary critical interpretation. Michael Heyman understands this impulse to interpret, but, in ‘A New Defense of Nonsense; or, Where Then Is His Phallus? and Other Questions

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Not to Ask’, he warns us to resist it when reading literary nonsense, a warning with which the poem’s syntax is in accord. Heyman reminds us that literary nonsense ‘offer[s] endless loops of meaning, constantly making and breaking sense-relations between words themselves and between the word and the world’. Therefore, he adds, to ‘experience the full effect of nonsense’ one must learn to enjoy ‘endlessly juggling a meaning and its absence’, learn to resist fixing the meaning of any example of literary nonsense.<sup>23</sup> Farmer George’s six badgers, encircling him – yet bowing as they do – are suggestive of this endless loop of signification, their wands threatening (like the wands of Blake’s beadles), but also beautiful (‘white as snow’), pointing the way home to a hearty, nourishing meal. The world created by ‘Six Badgers’, built on the opposition of the marvellous (talking, wand-wielding badgers) and the quotidian (‘so common a thing’), rests on this grammatically unasked and ultimately unanswerable question. It is a question as fine as a group of dog-badgers with white wands in hand, and it is an unanswerable, unasked question that the poem answers (if you will grant me a nonsensical contradiction) with a single, two-syllable word, one as common as warm dinner after a day’s hard work, and one just as marvellous: *nonsense*. And just maybe that is answer enough.<sup>24</sup>

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**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘Nonsense’. Michael Heyman and Kevin Shortsleeve elaborate on the linguistic development of the sense of nonsense in their essay, ‘Nonsense’, in *Keywords for Children’s Literature*, ed. by Lissa Paul, Philip Nel and Nina Christensen, 2nd edn (New York UP, 2021), pp. 133-36.

<sup>2</sup> Explored by a thirty-year-old Robert Graves in *Poetic Unreason* (London: Palmer, 1925), a work which Biblio and Tannen Booksellers and Publishers would republish in 1968, only eight years after *The Penny Fiddle*.

<sup>3</sup> 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), p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘children’s verse’ implies a hierarchical distinction between verse and poetry, one articulated by John Hollander in *Rhyme’s Reason*, in which he writes: ‘Poetry is a matter of trope; and verse, of scheme and design [...] which is why most verse is not poetry’. *Rhyme’s Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the neglect of children’s poetry by those in and out of the discipline of children’s literature, see my essay, ‘Modern and Contemporary Children’s Poetry’, in *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, ed. by Alfred Bendixen and Stephanie Burt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1103-22.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Joseph, ‘Poetic Nonsense: Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* and Children’s Poetry’, *Gravesiana*, 3 (2013), 667.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p. 675.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Graves, ‘Lift-boy’, in *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children* (London: Cassell, 1960), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> *Penny Fiddle*, pp. 27-9.

<sup>10</sup> Heyman and Shortsleeve, p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 133.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> Wim Tigges, *Anatomy of Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p. 102. Tigges is perhaps the best theorist of nonsense no one has ever read. In addition to his *Anatomy of Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi,

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1988), see also his excellent edited collection *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> *Penny Fiddle*, pp. 37-8.

<sup>15</sup> Tigges, p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Graves, *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes* (London: Benn, 1927), p. iii.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Graves, *Poetic Unreason* (London: Palmer, 1925), p. 126.

<sup>18</sup> See my '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', *Robert Graves Review*, 1.1 (2021), 53-81.

<sup>19</sup> D. N. G. Carter, *Robert Graves: The Lasting Poetic Achievement* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> *Penny Fiddle*, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the nonsensical aspects of 'The Six Badgers', see Michael Joseph's *'My Infant Head': A History of Children's Poetry in English; September 23, 2008 – January 10, 2009* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Libraries, 2008), p. 43, in which he explores the embodiment of nonsense in irregular meter. Granting that 'The Six Badgers' 'is light', he argues that its levity 'belies its complexity', and that the poem 'invites a consideration of the rigorous strangeness of poetry'. However, Joseph continues, it 'place[s] unusual demands on the reader's intelligence', as an awareness of that invitation depends somewhat on the reader's apprehension of its metrical peculiarities. Joseph explains, 'the theme of the impossible intruding upon the ordinary is conveyed metrically, as well as semantically, as a line featuring five stressed syllables (**why six fine dog-badgers**), intrudes upon an otherwise metrically placid tableau'. Joseph's observation resonates with the contrapuntal relationship of sense and nonsense so central to Tigges's conception of literary nonsense. The 'metrically placid tableau' operates as a sensical framework disrupted by the 'five stressed syllables' that function as a kind of metrical metonym for nonsense.

<sup>22</sup> Tigges, 'Anatomy of Nonsense', *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 16 (1986), 167; *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, pp. 23-46.

<sup>23</sup> 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), 193.

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<sup>24</sup> This essay is a much revised and extended version of ‘Smashing the Penny Fiddle: Colliding Oppositions in Robert Graves’s Children’s Poetry’, a paper I presented at the 118th Annual Conference of the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association (2021), as part of the ‘Masks and Paradoxes in the Work of Robert Graves’ panel sponsored by the Robert Graves Society.