

## Poems Selected by Gregory Leadbetter

*Gregory Leadbetter*

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It's often said that 'poetry' is a small world – the implication being that everyone involved with poetry (surely) knows everyone else: it's *that* small. This is, of course, untrue, but tends to be repeated by people (including some poets, editors, and others who should know better) who have misidentified their own personal network and frame of reference for the entirety of 'poetry'. Thankfully, poetry is and always will be bigger than any such necessarily limited view. It is better conceived as a vast commonwealth of human history, activity, and possibility in which there is always more to discover, to know, and to enjoy than we can ever wholly grasp, quantitatively. That said, the qualitative life of poetry is not abstract and distant: it is intimate and inward – present, sensuous, and stimulating in ways unique to its reader or auditor, wherever it is found. The centre and circumference of poetry lies within us, in the elasticity of our capacity for experience and the mysterious life of the languages we speak.

For these reasons and more, it's a great pleasure to introduce here two poets previously unpublished in *The Robert Graves Review* or its predecessor *Gravesiana*, who may also be new to readers of the journal.

Jonathan Davidson and I got to know each other through our shared participation in the literary culture of the Midlands of England, in and around Birmingham, and our mutual commitment to and interest in developing that culture. Jonathan has worked selflessly and passionately for years to promote the reading, writing, and enjoyment of literature of all kinds regionally, nationally, and internationally, often in ways invisible to those who don't work with him, which is partly why I am so pleased to be able to present here three new poems of his own.

His most recent book, *A Commonplace*, steps out of the convention of the single-author collection: setting his own poems in a

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companionable prose commentary, giving the reader further context for their contemplation, and including work by other poets and translators, bringing his poems into conversation with theirs. The three poems published here for the first time embody refreshing qualities now recognisably characteristic of Jonathan's work: a directness and frankness of diction, which uses simplicity to develop affective complexity; intense care given to versification and the possibilities of form, in the broadest sense of the word; and a lightly-worn responsiveness to the poetic traditions in which, both as a lifelong student and an experienced teacher of the art, he is aware he participates. These are qualities that, I like to think, would have appealed to Robert Graves himself.

I first met Medha Singh in India, at the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters in January 2019. I was there through a connection that had been made between Writing West Midlands – the organisation of which Jonathan Davidson is the Chief Executive and of which I am also a Trustee – and the Festival in Kerala, which took place in Thiruvananthapuram. Medha had travelled from New Delhi. She made an immediate impression on me, both warm and dynamic: when she learnt that the panels on which she and I were due to appear were discussion-based and did not include a scheduled poetry reading, she took me by the hand to the Festival desk, and before I knew it arrangements had been made for us to read together.

The three new poems by Medha that I have chosen are – again, appropriately for a journal dedicated to the work of Robert Graves – love poems, unafraid to face difficult truths in love and sex. Each, in its different way, bends time and space in its emotional reckoning: they are poems of the fourth (and fifth) dimension of which Graves wrote in his later criticism. The fabric of the language in these poems is sensuous, searching, and its evocative figurative character stirs, lightly, the wellsprings of myth.