

The Mead Vat

Jan 7
1961

Though once the cell was furnished only
With oak table and chair,
Two pegs in the wall, a goatskin rug, an inkwell,
A copper basin and an empty chest,
Now large sun tones and thin gay-jacketed children
Mount to the rafters on all sides of him
And look on window ledges.

But let me guard with this innovation:

The Queen of the Grove has visited him here
It has ruffled his thick hair
~~He~~ ^{has} drawn the pen from his hand to blot
A verse, or half a page, ~~removing~~ ^{removing} something
Lirich ~~which~~ ^{disguising} ~~of~~ her beauty

And if one day he goes, perless or workless,
To where her mead-vat smokes in the crystal hall,
Where the tall elst forgetter
Royally shod, his blood brothers & sisters
Under the chieftain trees, where wild birds call
And salmon leap the weir,
Will she forget such love and sturdiness?

Margot Callas

William Graves

Margot was born in Vancouver on 10 September 1935, of Greek father and Irish mother. She died in her cottage in the South of France, where she lived most of her last years on 15 April 2023.

She was married twice, her second husband being the comedian and later film director Mike Nichols. Their daughter is Daisy Gabriella Nichols.

Of great beauty, Margot was supremely independent. She came to Deià from Ibiza in 1959. Robert Graves met her when performing in an amateur theatrical in 1960 and soon after, she became his muse. Robert's love and adoration of Margot produced some of his best love poetry. She caused him great anguish when she went off with his then best friend Alastair Reid. Much has been written about the relationship in biographies and elsewhere.

Margot ceded her musedom to Aemilia Laracuen (literally on request) but kept in touch with Beryl Graves and the family and went with her to Russia. (Beryl even translated letters to Margot from a Russian beau she met there). Later Margot accompanied Robert and Beryl to Hungary. Reid remained friends with the rest of the family and wrote a moving obituary of Graves in the *New Yorker*.

Margot lived many unconnected lives, taking up carpentry, or acting (one night) in *Hair*. Robert wanted her to be the 'White Goddess' in a film that never was.

In her later years she lived in the South of France keeping very much to herself and though not even wanting to see Daisy in her old age, she kept in contact with her for thirteen years until the end. However, I saw her several times

in her London apartment, and spent many an enjoyable afternoon on the phone remembering old times.

Shortly before she died Margot sold Robert's letters to her to St John's College, where they are in safe keeping. Margot's letters to Robert were returned to her by Beryl Graves and presumably destroyed.

She will be long remembered by her friends as a very special person.

William Graves MBE was born in Devon England, 1940. He is the oldest son of Robert Graves and Beryl Graves. As well as being Robert Graves's literary executor, he is the honorary president of the Robert Graves Society, a founding member and unpaid elected director of the *Fundació Robert Graves* (a public entity), and the author of *Wild Olives: Life in Mallorca with Robert Graves* (1995). He has translated/edited Graves's *The White Goddess* into Spanish. Among many other projects aimed at perpetuating the legacy of his father, he is currently organizing transcriptions to his voluminous and wide-ranging correspondence, comprising over 9,000 separate letters.