

FOCUS ON ROBERT GRAVES

33.

Edited by Ellsworth Mason, University of Colorado Library, Boulder, Colorado

Number 3, December 1973.

Robert Graves's Debt to Laura Riding

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A greater familiarity with Laura Riding's work, acquired since the publication of my study of Graves's poetry in 1969, has involved for me a reassessment of Graves's achievement. As I tried to show in my book, he derived much in manner and thought from Laura Riding's work, and the signs of 'discipleship'¹ in his poems offer a unique opportunity for comparative evaluation.

The fact itself of his indebtedness suggests certain questions. What actually happens to the thought, manner and diction of Laura Riding when they are evacuated from their original context and resettled in the very different environment of his? Do they lose their original potency? If so, do they gain a different kind of life? Are his motives for using them different from hers in creating them? To know how he uses her work, I decided, would be to know how good his poetry is.

I have discovered that the extent of Graves's dependence upon Laura Riding's work is even more considerable than I had inferred from the limited evidence gathered for my book; and this needs to be demonstrated at some length before one can attempt to answer the questions posed in the previous paragraph. I do not want to be mistaken: my primary intention is not - or not merely - to establish and illustrate Graves's indebtedness, but to lay the ground for a critical comparison between the two poets.

The chief premise of Laura Riding's thought is that the truly contemporary mind is "finally, rather than historically, alive"². By "finality," she means the end of existence dominated by the physical and circumstantial and the beginning of life lived in the mind. "The human mind has reached the end of temporal progress... The future, that is, contains nothing but scientific development. It is an involuntary spending and manipulation of physical forces, empty of consciousness: it no longer matters"³. We are alive finally "by the degree to which we ourselves exist in thought rather than in history, and place reality in meanings rather than things"⁴. The missing factor from historical living is value, and to exist in thought is to create a world of "completeness and order - a universe of values"⁵.

Graves's association with Laura Riding ended in 1939 but her work has continued to provide material for his poems. In the sixties the notion of finality, time's end, became a central one. We hear of the Black Goddess, who succeeds the White Goddess as, in Laura Riding's thought, finality and full consciousness succeed history and merely bodily existence: for the Black Goddess represents "a final reality of love", and where the poet's sufferings under the rule of the White Goddess resulted from his embroilment with Time and the compulsions of the flesh, now he has come to a condition of timelessness and her dark sister "may even appear disembodied rather than incarnate"⁶. The lovers in 'Iron Palace'⁷, a poem contemporary with this statement, "live detached from force of circumstance, / As history neared its ending." 'Fact of the Act'⁸ speaks of "True love uncircumstantial." 'The Worms of History', written in the early forties, describes an end of history, after which "excellence" (Laura Riding's "universe of values") continues to live. God, says the poem, is only a name for "excellence", which is contrasted with "those lesser powers of life /

That God had groaned against but not annulled." This distinction copies one drawn by Laura Riding: "The lesser realities have now been articulated in their possible numbers, and the human mind is on the verge of the greater reality"⁹.

'End of Play' is also about the supersession of historical, physical existence by life in the mind. But it employs another set of images, for which, however, Laura Riding is also the source. In an essay entitled 'The End of the World, And After' she writes: "We have been lolling about in a perfectly disgusting way for thousands and thousands of years;" against such idleness she argues that "to reduce existence...to the size of active thought is surely more exciting than pleasure"¹⁰. Both indictment and assertion reappear in Graves's poem. "We have reached the end of pastime," it begins, and "We have at last ceased idling". Though the old deceitful love of the senses has died,

Yet love survives, the word carved on a sill
Under antique dread of the headman's axe;
It is the echoing mind, as in the mirror
We stare on our dazed trunks at the block kneeling.

Bodily existence has been not so much "reduced" as cut off, and the disembodiment of thought is represented as a more painful business by Graves than by Laura Riding. What is metaphor here becomes myth in The White Goddess and the poems which, like 'Darren', came out of it.

The underlying distinction in 'End of Play' is between the sloth of body and the alertness of mind, and it is basic to Laura Riding's view of things. "Our bodies may sleep, our bodies which exist in the past" - that is, in a historical rather than a final consciousness - "but our minds do not, cannot - our minds which once shared in the sleep of our bodies"¹¹. Often in her work the distinction is rendered as the difference between the sleep of life and the final waking of death. "The ages of time represent degrees of wakefulness merely... We are now wide awake - or we are not. So ends the world, so ends sleep, so ends the physical diffusion of our minds"¹². Set this with her poem 'Sleep Contravened'¹³:

Sleep forgotten is sleep contravened,
Sleep contravened is much longer mind,
More thought, more speaking....

Graves's 'Like Snow' depends heavily on this constellation of images:

She, then, like snow in a dark night
Fell secretly. And the world waked
With dazzling of the drowsy eye....

Snow falls like finality - "holding" yet cancelling "the histories of the night," or the night of history.

Frequently the contrast is simply between nature - life of the senses - and mind. To start with Graves: Nature, notoriously, gets short shrift in his poem 'Nature's Lineaments': her "pleasures are excreting, poking, / Havocking and sucking, / Sleepy licking." Tacitly the poem is about sex - the speaker seems to be a disgruntled lover - and, in fact, the idea seems to derive from an early essay about sex by Laura Riding. The child, she notes, "innocently indulges itself in sensual pleasures. It loves kissing and to be kissed, stroking and to be stroked, fondly contemplating its excretions"¹⁴.

Again, with the poem's jibe against Nature, "That all she has of mind / Is wind," compare the same essay's indictment: "This grotesque of socialized sex comes of the stupid attempt of intelligent man to make nature intelligent"¹⁵. We have the same contrast between mind and nature in 'Recalling War', one of Graves's best poems. Part of the falsity of the war experience, the poem states, is that after twenty years, in retrospect, it "now assumes the nature-look of time," and that "Our youth became all-flesh and waived the mind." 'Ulysses' speaks bitterly of sex: "flesh had made him blind... Flesh set one purpose in the mind/ Triumph

of flesh...." / In 'Down, Wanton, Down!' the male organ is addressed as "my witless". The jeering question that follows - "When were you made a man of parts / To think fine and, profess the arts" - recalls a satirical reference by Laura Riding to man's "fine phallus-proud works-of-art"¹⁶.

Her views about man and woman follow from the ideas connected with the words 'history' and 'finality'. Man lives in history, the physical, temporal world; woman lives in the final reality of general meaning and value - the eternal here and now. This is the reason, in Graves's 'Theseus and Ariadne' for the quietly drawn distinction between her living in the present and his almost lachrymose insistence upon the power of time. "he dreams", in the sleep of time, of the past, in memory dwelling on, finding reality in, what he imagines is decayed.

He sighs: 'Deep sunk in my erroneous past

She haunts the ruins and the ravaged lawns'.

And thus he misses the timeless reality. She, on the other hand, lives only in that "greater reality."

Of him, now all is done, she never dreams

But calls a living blessing down upon

What he supposes rubble and rank grass.

The word often used by Laura Riding - she once apologized for overusing it¹⁷ - is 'immediacy'. When we have "reached the end of temporal progress", she writes, we "behave with more and more fatally decisive immediacy"¹⁸. It is a word which Graves has found similarly useful. In a late poem, 'The Wedding', the miracle hailed by the poet is the lovers' living with immediacy: while they are joined "forever and a day" (a kind of punning adaptation of the fairy tale formula to the double meaning of 'immediacy'), "crowds of almost-men and almost-women / Howl for their lost immediacy."

To continue with Laura Riding's respective characterizations of man and woman. Woman is whole and single, man is divided and various. (Male and female are also classifications. "Female consciousness personalizes the singleness of truth in an entirety of diversified meaning; male consciousness personalizes diversity of meaning in an entirety of unique truth"¹⁹). This has influenced Graves's conceptions. In The White Goddess he says that woman is divine because she is whole; man "is divine not in his single person, but only in his twinhood". "Man envies her and tells himself lies about his own completeness."²⁰ Again, as with the figure of beheading in 'End of Play', an idea of Laura Riding's has become, by way of metaphor, an important element in Graves's myth; for 'twinhood' here, of course, refers to the poet's light and dark selves represented by the two heroes that do battle for the favor of the Goddess. Interestingly, in Collected Poems 1914-1947 Graves amended one word in an early poem, 'The Hills of May': the inaccessible woman in the poem, who originally "loved with a calm heart", now "loved with a whole heart."

A development of this last of Laura Riding's characterizations of the sexes is this: "Variety is the male making, oneness is the female consistency of the making"²¹. This formulation may be set alongside some sentences written in a language adapted to the understanding of Graves's young daughter: "People (she means men) who for some reason find it impossible to think about themselves, and so really be themselves, try to make up for not thinking with doing"²². It needs no ingenuity to find in all this the source of the title of a late Graves poem, and of the thought it summarizes: 'Man Does, Woman Is'.

With this character woman has some of the attributes of deity, and there are several mother-goddesses in Laura Riding's work. But Laura Riding is no mythographer; for her the sexual division is a universal classification, and her goddesses are presented wittily, ironically, and fantastically, and clearly figure the female category of general Truth, Reality as One. They prefigure, of course, Graves's own White Goddess, whose thought-status, however, is not so

clear; in Her he converts a playful fiction which is yet of serious ontological intent into a solemn legend of spine-chilling intent. In Laura Riding's story 'Eve's Side of It'²³ we meet the creatrix Lilith. There is the "mother-god" in 'A Film Scenario'²⁴, and Lady Port Huntlady in 'Reality as Port Huntlady'²⁵. But let me take Miss Banquett²⁶ as an example. As her name suggests, she represents the abundance of Reality-in-itself, reality before realization, Life in its essence. In the story she takes a voyage and populates the world of Cosmania so that Truth may be seen as Truth (manifest itself as Beauty). Each race created in Cosmania is a partial manifestation of Miss Banquett, never the whole of her. She becomes Love-goddess to each race, choosing (like the White Goddess) a man from each as partner. Finally, she withdraws from her created world, back into herself, Reality, and there she is "sufficient to herself"²⁷.

Resistant, impenetrable self-sufficiency is the quality in woman most admired by Graves. In 'New Legends' he pictures a new Andromeda, "Chained to no cliff, / Asking no rescue of me," and a new Atalanta, "Ever ahead, / Acquitting me of rivalry." But this quality is also the cause most frequently mentioned in the poems for the poet's torment. In 'Deed of Gift' the loved woman "gave herself to herself, this time for good", but, the poet is constrained to ask, "What debt of true love did she leave unpaid?" In 'Lyceia' she has to protest, against the animal solicitations of men, that "My beauty is my own." Compare also these lines -

All the wolves of the forest
Howl for Lyceia,
Crowding together
In a close circle
Tongues a-loll -

with these from Laura Riding's 'The Last Covenant', in which Reality is person-
alized as female:

Over this seeming she now rises.
Venus, they say, so rose.
But shameful, to be loved, divided,
Fed to the mathematic hounds
Whose pack increased of her,
Made whelpish worlds to howl profusion.

It is notable that Laura Riding's goddesses are mother-goddesses. The "pretty masterpieces", man's works-of-art, earn "woman's maternal indulgence; she is full of admiration, kind but weary. When, she sighs, will man grow up, when will he become woman, when will she have companions instead of children?"²⁸ The tone of this, "kind but weary", is to be heard in some of her poems too. A deity addresses her subjects in 'Benedictory', assuring them in spoken-to-the-child accents, that final Reality will not hurt when she brings it to them: "My loves, it happens sweet. It is a mothering wisdom." It is exactly the goddess's tone in Graves's poem 'Rhea' as she addresses the elements (from whose violence so-called "divine" Augustus and Gaius have fled in fear):

Rain, thunder, lightning: pretty children.
'Let them play', her mother-mind repeats;
'They do no harm, unless from high spirits
Or by mishap.

For Graves, as for Laura Riding, woman's role is primarily maternal. He notes it in The White Goddess: "Woman worships the male infant, not the grown man: it is evidence of her deity, of man's dependence on her for life"²⁹.

Laura Riding's theory of the sexual relationship, as set out in an essay entitled 'Idea of God',³⁰ starts from a distinction between a subjective and an objective orientation of the mind. Subjective feeling is to rest your understanding of something on the emotions you have about it; it constitutes an attempt to possess what is felt. Objective feeling is "to feel in the sense of being affected

without trying to understand it"; it applies "to what resists incorporation - what is 'bigger' than yourself." Starting from here Laura Riding develops a critical account of male attitudes. Man sees that woman exists beyond the boundaries of his rational world - "the overflowing unknown quantity"³¹. Because he "has cultivated subjective feeling at the expense of objective feeling", he feels his self-sufficiency endangered by the existence of this "something else", this not-self unadaptable to his mode of understanding; he must impose himself on the universe, expunge the unknown. He therefore seeks to annul the mystery represented to him by woman. He does this either by deifying her - removing the challenge of the unknown to a distance - or by possessing her sexually, making "his subjective experience of her the complete experience." Laura Riding speaks, in this connection, of "the emotional confusion of one mind with another"³². Graves's satirical poem 'The Thieves', in which it is featured as the vice of lovers, evidently originates in this interpretation of sexual relations:

Lovers in the act dispense
 With such meum-tuum sense
 As might warningly reveal
 What they must not pick or steal,
 And their nostrum is to say:
 'I and you are both away'...

Neither can be certain who
 Was that I whose mine was you.

Man uses woman, the essay continues, as "an instrument of his subjectivity; as such she is what he 'loves', identifies with himself." Therefore she has only two aspects for him, according to whether she complies or does not comply with his desires: he "interprets her behaviour either as endearingly submissive complaisance or as devilishly inhuman caprice." This view of male psychology Graves adopted for his own in the early years of his association with Laura Riding, and it has remained with him ever since, tempered now, however, with a more indulgent attitude towards man. In the sixties he wrote that a poet "rejects the crude self-sufficient male intelligence, yet finds the mild complaisant Vesta insufficient for his spiritual needs." He instead elects to worship "renascent primitive woman", who treats him with cruel capriciousness³³. The truth of the matter, of course, is that she only seems capricious, to the male eye. Cruelty is merely man's interpretation of her need to defend, against his possessiveness, in Laura Riding's words, "that aspect of her which is only accessible to objective feeling." His refusal to acknowledge the limits of his subjective understanding, his persistence in trying to "incorporate" what is bigger than himself, combined with her refusal to be so possessed, turns woman into "the terrifying female figure of judgement" and leads, in terms of the White Goddess myth, to the 'death' of the poet-hero. Before that the clearest account in a poem by Graves of man behaving with the presumption of subjective feeling, suffering 'death', and being compelled to keep his distance, is in 'A Love Story'. Woman's consistency only seems self-contradiction, her wholeness ambivalence, to man, who seeks to use her for his own ends. It is male love that divides. As Graves writes in 'To Sleep', "The mind's eye sees as the heart mirrors" - which is subjective seeing; "Loving in part I did not see you whole." And, actually, a verbal model for this line appears in Laura Riding's 'It Is Not Sad':

Not me you sat with, but a pathos
 My partial image torn out of me.
 Nor did you have me whole.

There are several Graves poems which diagnose subjectivity in man - lustfulness and romanticism are its symptoms - and implicitly or explicitly contrast it with woman's objectivity. 'The Foolish Senses'³⁴, for example, explains contemptuously that the lover's suffering was self-engendered, not love at all:

That view is inward, foolish eye: your rolling
 Flatters the outward scene
 To spread with sunset misery. Foolish throat,
 That ill was colic, love its antidote...

The fear-created imaginings of the man in 'A Jealous Man' are also due to subjectivity - they create "a mind dream-enlarged" - and are contrasted with the calm if cold sanity of the woman. 'Green Loving'³⁵ opposes two kinds of loving. "Green loving" is merely natural, mortal, physical love - green is "The hue loyal to beauty below sky seen - and it is man's love. ('Green' is used by Laura Riding in this sense in 'The Tiger'³⁶ - "Eyes still from trees green-fresh / And full of tangled nature.") "Green loving" is to hold "no more / Than dreaming images of your own substance." It is distinguished from "clear sky, the clear eye" of objectivity, female love, and immortality:

You in woman's beauty
 I shall love till I die,
 As living green earthily
 The immortal sky.

Lilith, creatrix and personalization of Reality-as-One, in Laura Riding's story 'Eve's Side of It', "knew there were going to be men, and that they were doomed creatures - creatures with hopeless ambitions and false thoughts.... They wanted to make more than there actually was." This is man's romanticism, his dissatisfaction with things as they are and blindness to what actually is. It is interesting that, although Graves's evaluative standpoint has changed, he is referring to this element in man's character when he speaks, as he has done recently, of a "solar perfectionism" in man and how the Muse-woman "could not be bound by his hopes for her perfectibility"³⁷. Sun and moon symbolism plays an important part in Graves's poems and mythological writings (and, as we shall see, even this is not without its precedents in Laura Riding): Sun for man, male love, the male mind, Moon for woman, female love, the female mind. The poet, he writes, is "Sun-like in his maleness and heroic pride." In the same essay he says that the "final reality of love" will come about by a reconciliation of "lunar with solar time,"³⁸ repeating Laura Riding, who had declared that "love between male and female consciousness is the method by which life as love of truth is generated"³⁹. 'The Challenge'⁴⁰, the poem of Graves's that most completely expounds her conception of the man-woman relationship, portrays the poet as a solar hero who once held woman in sexual dominion but has since been punished for his presumption.

In ancient days a glory swelled my thighs....
 Sun was my crown, green grassflesh my estate....
 Queens I had to try my glory on....
 Time was my chronicler, my deeds age-new,
 And death no peril, nor decay of powers.
 Glory sat firmly in my body's thrones.

The sun of male love was lust, bound by time, nature and the senses. But the moon rose and "drained the wholesome colour from my realm." The moon, then, is "another crown", which man cannot possess, though "thievishly he longs / To diadem his head with stolen light":

The Moon's the crown of no high-walled domain
 Conquerable by angry stretch of pride.

The moon's rule broke the dominion of bodily love: "Glory was gone, and numb was all my flesh". The poet's physical world is now bounded by woman's mental world, "White horizons beyond touch". Not only in general conception but in the kinds of meaning mediated by the symbolism this poem owes something to Laura Riding. From three of her poems I select the following lines for comparison. 'Tale of Modernity'⁴¹ speaks of lust as known by Shakespeare:

By night Lust most on other men
Its swollen pictures shone...

The sun in guise of Truth gave pardon...

'O sexual sun...'

The sun the bold, the moon the hidden...

The moon a whispering, white, smothered...

Truth seemed love grown cool as a brow,

And young as the moon...

'All Things'⁴² identifies man's inordinate, romantic ambition with his "pride", as Graves much later associated his "solar perfectionism" with his "heroic pride":

All things once sun were

Which more and more was

The pride that could not be...

Impossibility of being sun,

Death's too proud enemy.

The flaw in his pride is the impossibility of unaided nature surpassing nature (sun defeating death). The mind alone, in transcending nature, can transcend death. In 'The Signs of Knowledge'⁴³ it is called "moon-sense":

Let the thought see, let moon undazzle sun.

Sun of world, moon of word...

...undeath of mind-sight.

* * * * *

After this far from exhaustive investigation of Graves's indebtedness to Laura Riding - I have avoided duplicating what is already adduced in my book - I can return to the question of their relative standing as poets. It is notable that, despite his heavy reliance on the content and style of her work, he never ceased to be a very different poet from her. The difference in their relation to a common body of thought (hers) is, it seems to me, the difference between a major and a minor poet. Comparison of her 'World's End' with his 'End of Play' - each presenting an image of the same event, the end of history and the coming to a finality of consciousness - should be a fair test of this judgement.

'World's End' - to confine comment to the essential - lives entirely in the developing logic of its images.

The tympanum is worn thin.

The iris is become transparent.

The sense has overlapped.

Sense itself is transparent.

Speed has caught up with speed.

Earth rounds out earth.

The mind puts the mind by.

Clear spectacle: where is the eye?

All is lost, no danger

Forces the heroic hand.

No bodies in bodies stand

Oppositely. The complete world

Is likeness in every corner.

The names of contrast fall

Into the widening centre.

A dry sea extends the universal.

No suit and no denial

Disturb the general proof.

Logic has logic, they remain

Locked in each other's arms,

Or were otherwise insane,
 With all lost and nothing to prove
 That even nothing can live through love.

The feeling within the logic is the feeling of finality, of having arrived at the ultimate goal; one hears it in the end-stopped lines, the short unflowing rhythm with its emphatic, conclusive stresses. The feeling might be called impersonal, in the sense that it reflects, so to speak, everybody's response to a general condition; a better word would be 'suprapersonal', to signify a going-beyond personality rather than a denial of it. A personal engagement is inherent in the wit that, contrasting "All is lost" with "no danger...", triumphs over the contrast and makes them mean the same. It is not a state without appropriate emotion, but the poet is there, living with unselfquestioning assurance within it: "No suit and no denial / Disturb the general proof."

'End of Play', on the other hand, is full of strenuous personal emotion.

We have reached the end of pastime, for always,
 Ourselves and everyone, though few confess it
 Or see the sky other than, as of old,
 A foolish smiling Mary-mantle blue;

Though life may still seem to dawdle golden
 In some June landscape among giant flowers,
 The grass to shine as cruelly green as ever,
 Faith to descend in a chariot from the sky...

We have at last ceased idling, which to regret
 Were as shallow as to ask our milk-teeth back;
 As many forthwith do, and on their knees
 Call lugubriously upon chaste Christ.

We tell no lies now, at last cannot be
 The rogues we were - so evilly linked in sense
 With what we scrutinized that lion or tiger
 Could leap from every copse, strike and devour us...

Yet love survives, the word carved on a sill
 Under antique dread of the headsman's axe;
 It is the echoing mind, as in the mirror
 We stare on our dazed trunks at the block kneeling.

Though he says "We have reached the end of pastime" in the first line, the rest of the poem is not implicit in that statement, as Laura Riding's poem is in her first line. The conclusiveness of Graves's line is not a settled conclusiveness. Even there, and certainly in the whole stanza, Laura Riding's merely unflowing rhythms have been exchanged for a movement curt with contempt and a vindictiveness that lashes out in "foolish". Contempt that strikes out vindictively expresses insecurity in the poet: the excess of rejection implies the poet's emotional involvement in the attitudes he rejects - the grass had been cruel to him, the pastoral illusions of golden times of infinite leisure in a larger-than-life landscape were his. The conclusiveness of the new love, that "survives", does not bring real conclusion, for it is expressed in an image of pain, which brings the poem, as usually in Graves, to a deadlock of opposing emotions, not as in 'World's End' to an identity of opposites. Laura Riding's poem has a securer grasp of its experience, an inwardness with her values. I do not 'believe in' Graves's surviving love as a thing-in-itself: the image is there as a whip to beat the dog (of himself) with. The loud excess of "foolish", "lugubriously", "evilly", as often in Graves, asks to be taken as a satiric gesture, a struck attitude; but if we take it as such the nature of the poem is left in

doubt: does he feel like this or doesn't he? Laura Riding means what she says, is where the poem says she is; and this being so, we have participated in an experience that expands us: with Graves we have merely watched someone undergoing personal conflict, thrashing about, and coming to a token conclusion.

This comparison makes clear one thing, that what Graves takes from Laura Riding, though large, does not become the focus of his poem. The focus is the poet, the gesture made, the attitude taken - always personal. In a Riding poem the focus is the thought, defined with precision and fineness of distinction; the feeling is of the sort appropriate to a focus that is general, suprapersonal, an index of the poet's engagement with what is not merely personal. Where Graves seems to be defining something, as her poetry defines, or making a statement, he is really drawing our attention to the emotional situation that issued in the statement and to feeling that may either accord with or contradict the statement or do both at once. Thus, whereas she lives in her thought, for the truth of her vision of finality, he seeks a personal certitude with her thought, uses it to bring certainty, impose discipline, to punish himself or to settle scores with the world, not for the truth of the thought itself. The difference is between thought felt (Riding) and the subjecting of emotion to the rule of ideas (Graves).

The sense of their relationship disclosed by Laura Riding in some of her writings supports the distinction I draw between them as poets. In a prose piece that has direct reference to him she writes: "And Robert, you say, 'Be still while I add up again'. No, I will not be your perhaps greater result, I will not be your to be. I will not be a proof that any more can be of making sure, of the fear that having may be not having, when right seems too right"⁴⁴. He wants the emotional assurance of knowing the truth rather than the truth itself. He even has a fear that in gaining truth he may be losing more than he can afford. Many of Laura Riding's poems are addressed to Graves, a few openly, most anonymously; others are about, or addressed to, man. Her reference may be both specific and general when, in one poem, 'The Need To Confide'⁴⁵, she diagnoses a lack of final commitment - "Yours, man, was but the language of the wish" - and in another, 'The Dilemmist'⁴⁶, a fear of yielding himself to the ultimate thing desired.

Why, you'd rather again the old hours,
The swift deaths and new lives and changes,
Than to be dawdling-dead like a poet
With but one death to die, and that everyone's.

Certainly, Graves has always been a poet of desire and will, not statement, and except during the years of his association with Laura Riding his critical pronouncements have suggested that he knows it. In his earliest criticism he maintained that all poetry originates in emotional conflict and indeed that its vitality springs from that, specifically from what he called "the old pulse of love and fear"⁴⁷. In 1962 he said the same thing, in mythological terms: in the Muse, he wrote, the poet is invoking "the ancient power of love and terror"⁴⁸. Love, for Graves, is what may bring emotional equilibrium, certitude; fear is the fear of its non-arrival. Desire and will, in Graves's poetry, are partnered by their negatives, hatred and rejection. 'The Dilemmist' concludes with a prediction that Graves will subject himself to the new timeless love only in "mad hate of self." The "scorching" of the old love ("swift deaths and new lives and changes") will "send him all speed"

To look for other clime than body-heat
Be that however sunless other-place,
And he in such made hate of self
To swear madness against his likest love -

the love most like him and the one he likes best. There are many poems which this description fits. Besides those already mentioned in this essay, two spring

immediately to mind - 'Trudge, Body, Trudge' and 'The Furious Voyage'.

The difference between Graves and Laura Riding illustrates, then, one distinction that exists between some minor and some major poetry. Where Graves's poetry is subjective in the sense that it reduces themes of potentially general significance to the narrow compass of a personal situation, Laura Riding's poetry expands the personal situation to include the suprapersonal. From Graves's subjectivity follows his inability to make a final, objective commitment. This is what emerged from my discussion of 'End of Play' and 'World's End'. All I can do now is fill out my case a little with further examples.

If we compare Laura Riding's 'Earth' with an admittedly much less ambitious poem by Graves, 'The Next Time', which, however, has drawn on the Riding poem for its central idea, we may note a tendency characteristic of Graves to make something merely charming out of what at source has weight and seriousness. In her poem Earth symbolizes our deepest humanity, the ultimate reality of ourselves; one is tempted to use Tillich's phrase, "the ground of being." She is addressing someone, possibly Graves himself, who seeks but fears to commit himself to this reality.

Have no wide fears for Earth:
Its universal name is 'Nowhere'.
If it is Earth to you, that is your secret.
The outer records leave off there...

Our human nature is not fully described in terms of the physical and external.

Heavens of otherness, known and imagined, constitute

a time before Earth was

From which you inward move

Toward perfect now.

Ultimate reality, the Earth whose universal name is 'Nowhere', is "potential here of everywhere."

Finally,

Earth is your heart

Which has become your mind

But still beats ignorance

Of all it knows -

As miles deny the compact present

Whose self-mistrusting past they are.

Have no wide fears for Earth.

Destruction only on wide fears shall fall.

In 'The Next Time' Graves speaks hypothetically, using only "the language of the wish", of the same condition.

And that inevitable accident

On the familiar journey - roughly reckoned

By miles and shillings - in a cramped compartment

Between a first hereafter and a second?

And when we passengers are given two hours,

The wheels failing once more at Somewhere-Nowhere,

To climb out, stretch our legs and pick wild flowers -

Suppose that this time I elect to stay there?

This takes from 'Earth' the "Somewhere-Nowhere", and from "As miles deny the compact present" elaborates the journey metaphor for life in time and space. 'Earth' presents a general condition and the emotion accompanying the definition of it is serene, confident self-possession with a kindness toward the person addressed.

In 'The Next Time', the notion of an "inevitable accident" releasing the poet from the prison of time has more of superstition - the glamor, shall we say, of ghosts and haunted houses! - than ontology in it, and Laura Riding's conceit about "miles" and the "compact present" acquires a sort of nursery rhyme homeliness when it becomes "miles and shillings." Graves has substituted for the serious thought of

'Earth' the pleasant fancy of picking wild flowers and, in the supposition of the last line, a romantic tentativeness.

It is also notable that the tone of the poem directs our attention more to the poet than to what he is saying - to his offhand manner, the poise that discloses the easy familiarity with this experience of one who is too well-bred to give it an immodestly full treatment. This personal focus is a characteristic not only of Graves's slighter poems. Is not 'The White Goddess' - a poem that converts ultimate reality, romantically, into a person - similarly limited by the self-praising words "scorn", "virtue", "headstrong and heroic"? They reduce our view of that reality to a view of the poet's (not entirely edifying) excitement. Deification, oddly enough, is a strategy for avoiding objective commitment. It sets this greater reality (Goddess) at a distance, where it may remain no more than an exciting possibility: actual dwelling in it is unnecessary. Laura Riding's theme is precisely this strategy in 'Divestment of Beauty', where she speaks of the "long robe of glamour" bestowed upon women by men and "the homage of the eye" that deifies them. She asks what would happen if the real woman were discovered beneath her "lady swaddlings":

It were a loathsome spectacle, you think?

Eventual entrails of deity

Worshipful eye offending?....

Forswear the imbecile

Theology of loveliness,

Be no more doctor in antiquities -

Chimeras of the future

In archaic daze embalmed...

The last lines might almost be referring to the White Goddess enterprise - astonishingly, since they date from well before the time of its conception.

A mirror-watching self-consciousness on occasions damages Graves's satirical poems. Thus 'The Legs', a satire on the mindless conformism of people emblemized as walkers "from the knees down", is less interested in hitting any target than enjoying striking an attitude. At one point he wonders whether he might not be immune from the same fate, but this is no real interruption to the poem's flow of self-approval. We share the pleasure of arrogance with the poet - the pretence of self-doubt is only a refinement of the arrogant lip-curl. Of course, it is satirical routine to strike such poses and make such feints, but a satirist must not rest there. A more serious poem, 'To Walk On Hills', is not so much uninterested in as uncertain of its target. (The interested reader might look up the poem in the Collected Poems to check the accuracy of my reading). It has the air of defining something in the Riding manner:

To walk on hills is to employ legs

As porters of the head and heart

Jointly adventuring towards

Perhaps true equanimity.

Compare the opening of Laura Riding's 'Death as Death': "To conceive death as death / Is difficulty come by easily." Graves is supposedly defining and satirizing the sentimental-romantic quest, but the poem reads more like the dramatic monologue, as does 'Nature's Lineaments', of a disaffected romantic. He has not decided whether he is satirizing romanticism or parodying the sourness of the ex-romantic, and allows both impulses into the poem without resolving them. Both poems betray the discomfort that Graves felt in adopting views not his own - for the ostensible targets, nature, life of the senses and the emotions, are, of course, Laura Riding's. And this is where I would lay my final stress. He went to her to enlarge his poetry, to stiffen it with intellectual authority. In most cases her thought - felt as inseparable from her personality - merely became another source of conflict within the poem; ideas became an expression of violent emotion.

FOOTNOTES.

1. Quoted from a Graves letter by Douglas Day, Swifter Than Reason (University of North Carolina Press, 1973), p. 152.
2. Epilogue I (Seizin: Constable, 1935), p. 4.
3. Epilogue III (Seizin: Constable, 1937), pp. 116-17.
4. Epilogue III, p. 20.
5. Epilogue I, p. 3.
6. Mammon and the Black Goddess (Cassell, 1965), p. 165.
7. Except where otherwise noted Graves's poems are quoted from Collected Poems 1965 (Cassell, 1965).
8. Poems 1965-1968 (Cassell, 1968).
9. Epilogue III, p. 108.
10. Epilogue III, p. 4.
11. Epilogue III, p. 2.
12. Epilogue III, p. 3.
13. Except where otherwise noted Laura Riding's poems are quoted from Selected Poems (Faber, 1970).
14. Anarchism Is Not Enough (Cape, 1928), p. 187.
15. Anarchism Is Not Enough, p. 196.
16. Anarchism Is Not Enough, p. 208.
17. Epilogue II (Seizin: Constable, 1936), p. 134.
18. Epilogue III, pp. 116-17.
19. Epilogue III, p. 21.
20. The White Goddess, 3rd, amended and enlarged ed. (Faber, 1952), p. 109.
21. Experts Are Puzzled (Cape, 1930), p. 21.
22. Four Unposted Letters to Catherine (Hours Press, 1930), p. 11-12.
23. Progress of Stories (Seizin: Constable, 1935).
24. Epilogue II.
25. Progress of Stories.
26. "Miss Banquett; or the Populating of Cosmania", Experts Are Puzzled, pp. 49-94.
27. Experts Are Puzzled, p. 85.
28. Anarchism Is Not Enough, p. 208.
29. The White Goddess, p. 109.
30. Epilogue I.
31. Madeleine Vara, Convalescent Conversations (Seizin: Constable, 1936), p. 97. Madeleine Vara is a pseudonym of Laura Riding. This identification is here authorized for the first time by the writer herself, Laura (Riding) Jackson.
32. Epilogue III, p. 3.
33. Mammon and the Black Goddess, p. 161-2.
34. Poems 1930-1933 (Barker, 1933).
35. Collected Poems (Cassell, 1938).
36. Collected Poems (Cassell, 1938).
37. "Intimations of the Black Goddess", Mammon and the Black Goddess, p. 159.
38. Mammon and the Black Goddess, p. 164.
39. Epilogue III, p. 20.
40. Collected Poems (1938).
41. Collected Poems (1938).
42. Collected Poems (1938).
43. Collected Poems (1938).
44. Anarchism Is Not Enough, p. 97.
45. Collected Poems (1938).
46. Collected Poems (1938).
47. Poetic Unreason (Cecil Palmer, 1925), p. 83.
48. Oxford Addresses On Poetry (Cassell, 1962), p. 61.

(This article is a revision of a paper presented for the first Seminar on Robert Graves at the MLA annual meeting, 27 December 1972.)

The Robert Graves Collection at the University of Victoria

by Howard Gerwing

In 1969 Bertram Rota Ltd. offered the University of Victoria an opportunity to start a collection of original material concerned with the poet and writer Robert Graves. With very little hesitation the Librarian, Mr. Dean Halliwell, and the Administration of the University decided this was a splendid chance to significantly enhance a growing collection of manuscript aimed at providing the proper basis for a graduate research program in the field of modern English Literature.

The collection of letters between Robert Graves and Amelia Laracuen dated 1959 to 1968 was purchased, and a legal agreement between the contracting parties gave the University of Victoria the right to publish the letters. But this valuable correspondence collection is restricted against all public and private research and will not be made available until ten years after the death of both Robert Graves and Amelia Laracuen.

This first purchase established a happy relationship and through the good offices of Anthony Rota and Selwyn Jepson, literary executor for Robert Graves, the University of Victoria has continued to add extensively to one of its more significant research collections.

The Collection now available for research through the permission of Robert Graves consists of 13 Lots.¹ Lot 1 contains a complete autograph diary of 1,546 pages detailing four years in the lives of Robert Graves and Laura Riding. The period covered is from 22 February 1935 to 6 May 1939, during which time they lived in Mallorca, Lugano, England, Brittany and Pennsylvania. The 'Diary' also contains 117 enclosures of such things as letters from his children, photographs, and press cuttings, as well as 99 other miscellaneous items such as type scripts of poems, articles and letters. An attempt was made to keep the enclosures and miscellaneous items at the exact pages they were included in the 'Diary'.

Lot 2 contains a 1,059 page autograph manuscript of an adaptation of The Pickwick Papers by Norman Cameron. Robert Graves states that he encouraged Norman Cameron to attempt this rewrite of Pickwick Papers "at Deya about the year 1933 (?)". Graves further states that he was rewriting David Copperfield at the time and he rewrote the first two chapters of Pickwick Papers "to give Norman a start", which was accepted and copied out by Cameron. The first two chapters constitute pages 1-101 of the manuscript.

Lot 3 contains 31 pages of letters from Robert Graves to Isla Cameron, a folk singer, recording artist, and broadcaster, who was for some years a friend of Graves and his circle. The letters are dated from 1961 to 1968 and include a considerable amount of information on Graves' private and artistic life. This section also contains 18 pages of manuscript poems, nine of which are autograph, two typescript, two carbon typescript, dated from 1960 to 1970 and dedicated to Isla Cameron.

Lot 4 contains 19 pages of autograph letters to James Reeves covering the years 1964 to 1970. These letters give information about Graves' daily life, health, travels, family, and work. He describes various phases of his writings with such statements as "poems in a new region of craziness;" "lectures getting very unlecturelike;" "writing nothing but Songs of obsessional perfectionism." Of course, poems and verse comments are included as well as high praise for Reeves' own poetry. Graves turned seventy in July 1965 and these letters reveal a lively and bustling artist.

Lot 5 contains a small collection of letters dated from March 23, 1943 to December 1, 1943 from Graves to Keidrych Rhys, editor of Wales.

¹The first public listing of the Robert Graves Collection at the University of Victoria appeared in Focus on Robert Graves, No. 1, Jan. 1972, pp. 12-14.

Lot 6 contains 123 pages of "recent worksheets of poems and prose." The first 69 pages are several versions of fourteen poems, followed by 15 pages of a draft manuscript of a "prose piece on Humanism," and 10 pages of several drafts of a "foreword to a forthcoming book of poems", and a 2 page "fragment on poetry and pollution". The final 25 pages of carbon typescript of "Juvenilia and other poems" also contains a typed copy of a letter from Christopher Hassall, a letter from Patricia Butler (18 February 1959) and two press cuttings.

Lot 7 contains 200 pages of autograph letters from Graves to Selwyn Jepson, dated 1950 to 1967. There are 129 signed letters, the majority of which are written on quarto airmail paper and sent from Deya, Mallorca, plus one post-card and two telegrams. In the beginning the letters deal mainly with praise of Jepson as a novelist and their growing friendship, and then finally develop into Graves' "confidence in Jepson as advisor and aide in business matters." This very productive period includes such publications as The Nazarene Gospels Restored, Occupation Writer, Poems 1951, The White Goddess, The Greek Myths, The More Deserving Cases, and Colophon to Love Respelt. The commentary in these letters is far ranging covering not only his publications and his career as a writer but also theater and film projects and the more important aspects of his personal life. There are a further 47 pages of related material and other correspondence as well as press cuttings and three interesting photographs of Graves.

Lot 8 contains 1,623 manuscript pages of poetry "Worksheets." This collection includes numerous drafts of poems contained in Collected Poems 1965, Poems 1965-1968, Poems 1966, Poems 1968-1970. Many of the draft versions have different titles from the final published versions. Graves' habit of rewriting poems is clearly demonstrated in this lot of manuscripts and it would be difficult to find a more obvious exposition of Graves' concept of "found poetry".

Lot 9 contains 22 original drawings of Majorcan scenes executed by Paul Hogarth to illustrate texts by Robert Graves in the book Majorca Observed (London, Cassell, 1965), plus a further drawing and a caricature of Graves which were not used in the book. There are a further 12 pages to this lot of 2 letters (27 July 1967, 27 November 1968) to H. M. Currie of the Virgil Society, and 9 letters and 1 correspondence card to Paul Hogarth dated from 1963 to 1965.

Lot 10 contains 1,314 pages of prose worksheets of the book Hebrew Myths: The Book of Genesis (London, Cassell, 1964) by Robert Graves and Raphael Patai. There are several drafts, corrected galley proofs, and some correspondence between Patai and Graves.

Lot 11 contains a 132 page typescript, a translation by Graves of Ramon Sender's La Luna de los Perros (New York, 1962), heavily corrected in Graves' autograph. This translation, entitled Dogs Watch the Moon, is unpublished.

Lot 12 contains 277 pages of copious drafts of three of Graves' lectures as Oxford Professor of Poetry. The three lectures are titled Technique; a dirty word, Vulgarity, and The Valley of Dry Bones.

Lot 13 contains 1,492 pages of drafts of over 120 shorter prose pieces that were published between 1954 and the late 1960s. These typescripts and holographs appeared as essays, reviews, forwards, prefaces, and articles in numerous books and journals. Drafts of three short stories by John Auerbach, heavily revised in Graves' holograph, are also included. The amount of correction and revision in all of these manuscripts is characteristically high.

The poetry worksheets of the Robert Graves Collection have been used in an advanced bibliography course of the English Department of our University. Professor Robin Skelton, editor of The Malahat Review, is also busy with publication projects derived from the Graves Papers, but the Collection is yet to realize its full potential as a prime source of literary research.

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