FOCUS ON ROBERT GRAVES

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

Number 4, June 1974.

The Georgian Infancy of Robert Graves*

by Myron Simon

The destinies of Robert Graves and Georgian poetry have been oddly intertwined. Both emerged in the years immediately preceding the first World War, both went into extended eclipse in the 1920's, and the fortunes of both commenced again to rise in the mid-1950's. Yet, virtually all the commentators on Graves's poetry and criticism have either ignored the question of his relationship with the Georgians or have raised the question in order to absolve Graves of any real complicity in a poetic movement usually invoked for purposes of condemnation.

Nevertheless, Graves's involvement in Georgian poetry was--at least during the years from 1913 to about 1920--demonstrably full and profound. This involvement has been largely obscured by the reputations which have grown up about both Graves and Georgian poetry. That is, Graves's reputation for eccentricity and independence ill assorts with the Georgians' reputation for conventionalism and clannishness. Thus, there are historians of Graves's career who would flatly deny that he was ever really a member of the Georgian company despite his inclusion in the third, fourth, and fifth volumes of Georgian Poetry. And there are historians concerned with the stages of Graves's career who have typically acknowledged Graves's association with the Georgians in order to discount it as the first in a series of essentially discrete stages, as the first of several false starts in a career that has culminated triumphantly in the poetry of the White Goddess and the Black. Speaking of Graves's Goddess poetry, Randall Jarrell said, "...their whole meaning and texture and motion are different from anything we could have expected from Graves...."[1] Yet more recently, Michael Kirkham has concluded that "between 1923, when he left the Georgian fold, and 1926" Graves "turned himself into a modern poet."[2]

Graves's close involvement in Georgian poetry has been chiefly obscured by the general misrepresentation of the Georgians that issued in 1918 or 1919 from the debate between Sir John Squire's Neo-Georgians and Modernists like Pound, Eliot, Middleton Murry, and the Sitwells.[3] One may derive some sense of how imperfectly even recent interpreters of Graves have understood the principles of Georgian poetry from Michael Kirkham's assertion that it was only through his association with Laura Riding that Graves discovered poetry to be "the most direct means of apprehending reality."[4] If Kirkham had read the work of Abercrombie, Bottomley and Brooke and if he had examined the revisionist scholarship beginning with Christopher Hassall's biography of Edward Marsh in 1959,[5] he would not have rehearsed so uncritically the conventional misconstruction of the Georgians. We shall not begin to grasp the full sense in which Graves described himself as "the Georgian infant"[6] until we read the Georgians and use the new histories of Marsh's early Georgian circle.

The direct influence of Marsh and his early Georgian circle upon Graves was more substantial than is commonly supposed. In November of 1913, less than a year after the publication of the first volume of Georgian Poetry, while Marsh was lunching with George Mallory at Charterhouse, he was introduced to Graves, then an eighteen-year-old senior boy. He left with some verses by Graves in his pocket.[7] But Graves had undoubtedly been earlier familiarized

*Footnotes begin on p. 67.

© Ellsworth Mason, 1974.

with Marsh and his Georgians by Mallory, one of his masters at Charterhouse. Significantly, in terms of what we learn from Hassall about the centrality of Cambridge to the Georgians, Mallory was a Cambridge man and a friend of Brooke as well as of Marsh.[8] On February 1, 1913, about a year after their first meeting, Marsh had visited Mallory at Charterhouse where they "read aloud to each other the new Masefield poem."[9]

The Robert Graves who arrived at Charterhouse was the issue of a thoroughly Victorian home discipline, an unquestioning Christian, and the author of schoolboy verses written "in a romantic vein, of wizards, monsters, ghosts and outlandish events and scenes."[10] But through the pedagogy and friendship of George Mallory, Graves made his first direct contact with the liberating atmosphere of Cambridge:

> The most important thing that happened to me in my last two years . . . was that I got to know George Mallory. He was twenty-six or twenty-seven then, not long up from Cambridge. . . . From the first he treated me as an equal, and I used to spend my spare time reading books in his room or going for walks with him in the country. He told me of the existence of modern authors. My father being two generations older than myself and my only link with books, I had never heard of people like Shaw, Samuel Butler, Rupert Brooke, Wells, Flecker, or Masefield, and I was greatly interested in them. It was at George Mallory's rooms that I first met Edward Marsh, who has always been a good friend to me, and with whom, though we seldom see each other now, I have never fallen out. . . . Marsh said that he liked my poems, which George had showed him, but pointed out that they were written in the poetic vocabulary of fifty years ago and that, though the quality of the poem was not necessarily impaired by this, there would be a natural prejudice in my readers against work written in 1913 in the fashions of 1863.[11]

On June 28, 1914, as Graves was concluding his final year at Charterhouse, Marsh not only visited him there but provided him with a rare treat. He read Graves excerpts from the still unpublished King Lear's Wife, which--as Marsh must have guessed--was to figure prominently in the effect produced by the second volume of Georgian Poetry. On this memorable occasion, he told Graves "that his contributions to The Carthusian, the school magazine, showed high promise of a future Georgian."[12] From this time until the full emergence of the second stage of Georgianism, the Neo-Georgian Squire group, Graves plainly regarded Marsh as his mentor. Early in 1915, Marsh agreed to examine a sheaf of poems that Graves had left with him. According to Hassall, Marsh advised Graves to "properly acquaint himself with the 'modern' style and in particular study the work of Brooke."[13] In his reply to Marsh, Graves wrote of Brooke, "I think he is really good." And in response to Marsh's criticism of his poetry, Graves wrote thus:

> No, I'm not annoyed, why should I be? I always try to look at myself objectively and dispassionately because this helps me to get the full flavour of romance out of life. . . . However, I am still in my teens and when this ridiculous war is over I will write Chapter II at the top of the new sheet and with the help of other young Georgians to whom I trust you will introduce me, will try to root out more effectively the obnoxious survivals of Victorianism.[14]

In May of 1915, Graves sent to Marsh, for his approval, some verses which were to become part of his first book, Over the Brazier. He offered this work to Marsh as evidence that he had been guided by Marsh's injunction, earlier that year, to bring his "technique up to date."[15] Graves was then in France, at the Front,

from where he wrote to Marsh during the summer of 1916 to request that Marsh serve as his literary executor, with authority to make any revisions he wished.[16] In September of that year, while convalescing in Wales, Graves prepared his second book of poems, Fairies and Fusiliers, for the press. In doing so, he took careful account of Marsh's "copious critical notes" on his verses.[17] In a letter to Marsh in December of 1917, following the publication of the third volume of Georgian Poetry, Graves spoke of him as "the Father of Modern English Poetry"; and expressed the hope that he was at the point of producing poems which would please Marsh:

> Eddie, I am just beginning to feel that I know what I'm getting at and in this next year of 1918 if I'm spared I hope to satisfy the expectation you've had of me since I was a sixteen-year-old at Charterhouse.[18]

In January of the new year, Graves wrote again to his mentor that he was indeed learning his poetic lessons:

> I'm beginning to understand more clearly what Georgian Poetry means, and what it's going to mean by God's Grace.[19]

Whipperginny, published in 1923, is dedicated to Marsh. And more than three decades later, Graves said of Marsh that he was "proud to have gone to school under him"; and he echoed what he had first noted retrospectively in Good-bye to All That in 1929, that he had never quarreled with Marsh.[20]

Marsh, for his part, did not merely proffer advice to this ardent pupil; he cultivated Graves's friendship, and he measureably advanced Graves's literary career. Graves has himself recorded that when he went home to London on his first leave from France in September 1915, Marsh phoned "to arrange a meal."[21] Beyond such personal solicitude, however, Marsh used his considerable influence to launch Graves into print and to encourage an appreciation of his work in the right quarters. The extent of Marsh's involvement in the publication of Graves's first book of poems has been clarified recently by Monro's biographer. Since the publisher of Over The Brazier was Harold Monro, proprietor of the Poetry Bookshop, his name has figured too prominently in accounts of the book's provenance. But Miss Grant indicates that it was, rather, Marsh who was responsible for the book's appearing when it did with the Poetry Bookshop imprint:

> Owing to rising production costs, Monro published only one chapbook in the spring of 1916--Robert Graves's first volume, Over the Brazier. Edward Marsh was behind the undertaking, and it is clear that he was more taken with young Graves's work than was Monro.[22]

Further, Marsh's inclusion of Graves--during the following year--in the third volume of the then widely admired Georgian Poetry was an incalculable advantage to an unknown young poet. It created, almost overnight, a large audience for Graves; and thus goes far toward explaining why Fairies and Fusiliers (1917) was quickly reprinted, why Over the Brazier was reissued in 1920, and why Country Sentiment (1920) and The Pier-Glass (1921) were published in the United States as well as in England. Before and after Graves's arrival into print, Marsh celebrated his poetic virtues to other members of the Georgian fraternity and to their sympathizers. Early in 1916, in a letter to Sassoon, Marsh defended some of Graves's youthful poetic efforts as possessing "a turn of thought or vision, and a happy easy flow of expression," although he added the thoroughly Georgian reservation that they had as yet "no quintessence about them."[23] To de la Mare in 1921, Marsh "announced with pride that Graves was gaining in stature as a poet":

> I hope you like R.G.'s little book The Pier-glass--I'm immensely struck with it.[24]

Whatever his attitude toward Georgian Poetry once its character changed under the reactionary influence of John Squire, Graves's respect for the chief members of Marsh's original group was unmistakable. In 1916, Graves wrote to Marsh that he felt in "absolute sympathy" with Hodgson, Flecker, and Brooke to the point of wishing he could "pirate" their work as his own. Brooke especially, he stated, evoked that feeling in him:

> I hadn't read the fish's Heaven before, it is an exquisite thing. The Great Lover is so bantering yet so serious. . . . I feel in reading him that his is exactly the language I'm floundering to catch--musical, restrained, refined, yet not crabbed or conventionally antique, reading almost like ordinary speech.[25]

And in 1918, when--according to Hassall--the first rumors of the Modernists' hostility to Brooke were heard, Graves expressed to Marsh this estimate of Brooke's influence upon the younger Georgians:

> We all look up to him as to our elder brother and have immense admiration for his work from any standpoint, especially his technique, on which we all build.[26]

A few months later, Graves had occasion to tell Marsh, "I love to see the affection that is between us Georgians."[27]

Like the Cantabrigians in the early Marsh circle, Graves was a liberal and an agnostic. His liberalism grew out of his friendship with Mallory. In 1913, while still at Charterhouse, Graves "had bought Samuel Butler's Note Books, The Way of All Flesh and the two Erewhons."[28] In 1917, while convalescent in England, he attended Lady Morrell's circle of liberal intellectuals, which was strongly pacifist and included Bertrand Russell.[29] Although Graves had possessed "great religious fervour" when he arrived at Charterhouse, his view of religion began to shift by 1912.[30] And by 1917, he had "become a complete agnostic."[31] The mood of irreverent agnosticism which thoroughly informs Brooke's "Heaven" (1913)[32] is certainly present in Graves's "Goliath and David" (1916) and "A Boy in Church."[33] In the matter of politics, Graves's new liberal orientation and his acute personal sense of the economic distress produced by the war led him, by 1919, to espouse an unprogrammatic, broadly humanitarian socialism.[34]

Temperament and tutelage combined early in Graves to produce his inveterate stance of poetic independence and dedication. Graves's spirit of independence, his desire to know the world elementally without posturing and rationalization, was early expressed in his feeling for the North Wales terrain near Harlech:

> I suppose what I liked about this country . . . was its independence of formal nature. The passage of the seasons was hardly noticed there; the wind always seemed to be blowing and the grass always seemed to be withered and the small streams were always cold and clear, running over black stones.[35]

On the desolate, rocky hills behind Harlech, Graves "found a personal harmony independent of history or geography." He adds, "The first poem I wrote as myself concerned that hill-country."[36] When Graves went on leave from France in 1916, he spent part of it in remote Harlech in a cottage "away from the village," to which he planned to retire at the war's conclusion. His mood at this time was certainly affected by the desire to escape from the war, but it also reflected a young Georgian's awareness of the relation between disengagement and vision:

> I had decided to live there by myself on bread and butter, bacon and eggs, lettuce in season, cabbage and coffee; and to write poetry.[37]

Significantly, this passage is immediately followed by an attack on political rhetoric, on falsehood or sentimentality tricked out as truth and presented in a style intended to dissolve the listener's sense of independence:

> The power of his (Lloyd George's) rhetoric was uncanny. I knew

> that the substance of what he was saying was commonplace, idle and false, but I had to fight hard against abandoning myself with the rest of the audience. The power I knew was not his; he sucked it from his hearers and threw it back at them.[38]

Apart from Marsh, Graves's independent spirit was nourished most directly during the war years by Siegfried Sassoon. Like Graves, Sassoon had been the beneficiary of Marsh's encouragement before the outbreak of war; and together they ignored the approved poetic formulas. They regarded themselves as poets who would "scandalize the jolly old Gosse's."[39]

Most notably, Graves's early collections of poetry reveal an independent attitude toward the reviewers and the reading public. He was quite prepared to ignore their expectations, whether they demanded convention or novelty, in pursuing his art. The poem which introduces Fairies and Fusiliers is misunderstood if it is taken to be evidence of Graves's early attachment "to a worn-out tradition."[40] It does not assert that the old poetic ways are best. It declares, rather, that the youthful Graves will write as he pleases, that he must write out of his own experience and not out of regard for the vagaries of critical taste:

> Must winds that cut like blades of steel
> And sunsets swimming in Volnay,
> The holiest, cruellest pains I feel,
> Die stillborn, because old men squeal
> For something new: 'Write something new:
> We've read this poem--that one too,
> And twelve more like 'em yesterday'?
>
> No, no! my chicken, I shall scrawl
> Just what I fancy as I strike it,
> Fairies and Fusiliers, and all.[41]

And the poem which concludes Country Sentiment argues an essential opposition between the poet and his readers. The poet views his book as "discreetly" blending the themes of love, fear and hate, and childish toys. But he anticipates an adverse public response from those who want love rendered without fear and hate, on the one hand, and from those who can tolerate neither toys nor country lovers, on the other. Plainly, therefore, he cannot satisfy both himself and them.[42] If as a young poet eager for recognition Graves sometimes attended too closely to the expectations of the poetry-reading public, he early demonstrated his determination to suppress such poetic errors. He visited rather harsh self-judgments upon his departures from the independent practice of poetry. Of "A Rhyme of Friends" in Country Sentiment, Graves said, "This is only one of many of my early poems that contain falsities for public delectation."[43] And when, in 1927, he published his first volume of collected poems, Graves seized the opportunity "to scrape out the scrolls," to erase all the poems whose honesty was in any way questionable.[44] There is no more explicit statement of Graves's early commitment to poetic independence than his "Foreword" to the first number of The Owl, in whose run of three numbers he included poems by Hardy, Masefield, Davies, and de la Mare:

> It must be understood that 'The Owl' has no politics, leads no new movement and is not even the organ of any particular generation--for that matter sixty-seven years separate the oldest and youngest contributors. But we find in common a love of honest work well done, and a distaste for short cuts to popular success.[45]

Like Marsh's other Georgians, Graves frequently expressed his literary independence by avowing that his only loyalty was to poetry itself, that his pri-

mary dedication was to the muse. Graves's pronouncements on his own poetic career have invariably stressed his early exposure to poetry, its centrality in his life, and his willing acceptance of the burdens and duties imposed upon its dedicated practitioners. Graves has said that he "first made poetry the most important thing in (his) life" in 1910.[46] Something of his early dedication to poetry is evident in "The Last Day of Leave (1916)" in his reference to himself as "deep in love with a yet nameless muse."[47] Intensely distressed in the aftermath of the war by memories of his combat experience, Graves was nevertheless reluctant to secure psychiatric treatment for fear that the place of poetry in his life would be affected:

> Somehow I thought that the power of writing poetry, which was more important to me than anything else I did, would disappear if I allowed myself to get cured; my Pier-Glass haunting would end and I would become merely a dull easy writer. It seemed to me less important to be well than to be a good poet.[48]

"When I was working at a poem," Graves said, "nothing else mattered. . . ."[49] In "The God Called Poetry," Graves acknowledges poetry alone as his master, the single power that directs him.[50] Accordingly, he respected the dedication to poetry apparent in the practice of his fellow Georgians. For example, he remarked approvingly of de la Mare, "I could see how hard he worked at his poems. . . ."[51] And even the most scrupulous among the Georgian fellowship recognized Graves's exemplary poetic dedication:

> Davies drew up a list of contemporary poets, and as each poet sinned in some way against his high code of poetic integrity, or as a poet fell short of the high ideals he set for poetic conduct, he crossed his name off the list. Nicholson reported to Graves finally, 'They're all crossed off now except W. H. Davies and Robert Graves. . . .'[52]

Although Graves's early and influential interest in John Skelton has been frequently remarked,[53] it has not yet been properly related to his Georgian admiration for poetic independence and dedication. Rather, Graves's interest in Skelton has been too exclusively assigned to matters of technique. But it would be a serious error to view Graves's continuing interest in Skelton as merely prosodic. In fact, Graves's excited discovery of Skelton coincides closely with the time of his most direct involvement with Marsh and his Georgians. He has said that he "discovered" Skelton "by accident in 1916, while on short leave from the Somme trenches."[54] And he felt almost at once a strong affinity with Skelton:

> I had come more and more to associate myself with Skelton, discovering a curious affinity. Whenever I wanted a motto for a new book I always found exactly the right one somewhere or other in Skelton's poems.[55]

Eager to identify the true poets in his literary heritage, the historical analogues of the Georgians, Graves was quick to perceive the relevance of Skelton whose very unfashionableness at that time was in his favor. As early as his Fairies and Fusiliers collection of 1917, Graves had designated Skelton a kind of touchstone of genuine poetry, a useful and refreshing alternative to the academic tradition of rhetoricians and polymaths engaged in counterfeiting poetry for the applause of polite audiences:

> He struck what Milton missed,
> Milling an English grist
> With homely turn and twist.[56]

The precise sense in which Skelton served Graves as a model was thoroughly consistent with his Georgian orientation. Thus, Graves immediately ap-

proved those qualities in Skelton that earlier readers had ignored or minimized: his fierce poetic independence and uncompromising dedication to poetry without regard to personal cost. In his Oxford lectures on "our English poetic inheritance," Graves prefaced the account of his youthful discovery of Skelton with the declaration that Skelton is the "earliest and clearest example of the dedicated poet."[57] William Nelson has observed that the key to Skelton is his overriding concern with truth.[58] And Marsh's youngest Georgian was no less aware--well in advance of the scholarly interest in Skelton--of Skelton's distinctive poetic virtue, his flat unwillingness to prostitute the muse by turning rhetorician or flatterer. Looking backward to the revival of interest in Skelton following the first World War, Nelson correctly sketched the character of Skelton's appeal to Graves:

> Weary of the formal prettiness of schoolbook poetry, weary, too, of equally formal and self-conscious 'free verse,' Graves . . . found in Skelton a poet hidebound neither to traditionalism nor to antitraditionalism, a poet who had something to say and who found an effective means of saying it.[59]

The direct influence of Skelton upon Graves's early conception of poetry, as well as upon his prosodic practice, may be seen in "Free Verse":

> I now delight,
> In spite
> Of the might
> And the right
> Of classic tradition,
> In writing
> And reciting
> Straight ahead,
> Without let or omission. . . .[60]

It is precisely through Graves's insistence upon independence and dedication as requisite qualities of the true poet that it is possible to understand the sense in which his early poetry may be properly termed realistic. Very few of the poems in Over the Brazier and Fairies and Fusiliers are realistic in relation to their capacity literally to shock and horrify the reader, although "A Dead Boche"[61] is often cited as an instance of "trench realism." The majority of Graves's early poems have, indeed, been declared pastoral flights from reality and reversions to the romantic world of the nursery rhyme. But by reference to the Georgian poetic one may better understand the clear sense in which Graves can be described as a realistic poet.

Graves's early poetry is consistently realistic in its attention to concrete particulars, in its avoidance of the immoderate generalization that transforms experience into abstraction. Most of these poems represent Graves's palpable effort to make and to maintain direct contact with a world that is plural, unsystemic, and frequently perplexing or surprising. They represent no inclination toward moral judgment, but instead dwell intensely upon objective experiences and states of mind. Ronald Gaskell has observed that Graves's poems "represent an effort to see things as they are, and not as Graves would like them to be," that "The virtue of his verse is its immediacy, its closeness to experience."[62] This comment applies more fully to Graves's work between 1914 and 1920 than has been recognized by critics who conceive of realism merely as the massive introduction of grimly unpleasant documentation into art. Even "A Dead Boche" is less a "protest" poem, in the manner of Sassoon, than an effort to penetrate the approved patriotic abstractions which obscure and distort the specific circumstances of combat. Working with extreme care from actual experience,[63] Graves seems primarily intent upon directness and immediacy of presenta-

tion; the description is understated, and there is no attempt to establish its typicality or to interpret its meaning:

To you who'd read my songs of War
And only hear of blood and fame,
I'll say (you've heard it said before)
'War's Hell!' and if you doubt the same,
To-day I found in Mametz Wood
A certain cure for lust of blood:

Where, propped against a shattered trunk,
In a great mess of things unclean,
Sat a dead Boche; he scowled and stunk
With clothes and face a sodden green,
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

The same turning away from sentimental abstractions to the surprising asymmetry of concrete particulars is present in the situational irony--suggestive of Hardy's Satires of Circumstance--which informs "The Leveller":

Near Martinpuisch that night of hell
Two men were struck by the same shell,
Together tumbling in one heap
Senseless and limp like slaughtered sheep.

One was a pale eighteen-year-old,
Girlish and thin and not too bold,
Pressed for the war ten years too soon,
The shame and pity of his platoon.

The other came from far-off lands
With bristling chin and whiskered hands,
He had known death and hell before
In Mexico and Ecuador.

Yet in his death this cut-throat wild
Groaned 'Mother!' like a child,
While that poor innocent in man's clothes
Died cursing God with brutal oaths.

Old Sergeant Smith, kindest of men,
Wrote out two copies there and then
Of his accustomed funeral speech
To cheer the womenfolk of each.[64]

As a young Georgian poet, Graves never confounded poetic truth with improving doctrines or representational norms or egocentricity. It was, rather, what Jarrell has called "the mere seeing of reality."[65] The true writer was held to manifest a kind of humility in his relation to experience. He was not to manipulate it, and he was not to feign it; he was, rather, to convey what he felt and observed with maximal accuracy. Of Galsworthy and H. G. Wells, whom he met in 1916 or 1917, Graves preferred the former as more a writer than a propagandist:

> When I met him he asked me technical questions about soldier-slang--he was writing a war-play and wanted it accurate. He seemed a humble man and except for these questions listened without talking. This is, apparently, his usual practice; which explains why he is a better writer if a less forceful propagan-

dist than Wells.[66]

The cognitive realist wrote only when his vision was arrested by concrete details so intensely experienced as virtually to compel expression. Thus, truly realistic poetry was not the mechanical imitation of life or the versification of doctrines with undeniable relevance to the "real" world. Realistic poetry, as Georgianly conceived, originated unpredictably in the realm of general experience, a realm existing in substantial independence of the poet and his audience but available to them if properly approached. For example, in "Rocky Acres" Graves is intent upon defining the specific character of his intense attachment to the hilly terrain in North Wales. Although "Rocky Acres" is, in a sense, a landscape poem, there is nothing of the "set piece" about it, no sign that the hills have been subordinated to literary purposes. Instead, we hear a speaker whose consciousness has been extraordinarily engaged by specific features of that landscape which compel him to attempt their truthful, undeflected expression. In their wildness and cruelty, these rocky hills seem resistant to time, indifferent to life, unaware of compromise. Moreover, they enjoy the virtue of their vices; for they are too precarious, too unpromising, too "hard" to be sullied:

This is a wild land, country of my choice,
   With harsh craggy mountain, moor ample and bare.
Seldom in these acres is heard any voice
   But voice of cold water that runs here and there
   Through rocks and lank heather growing without care.
No mice in the heath run nor no birds cry
For fear of the dark speck that floats in the sky.

He soars and he hovers rocking on his wings,
   He scans his wide parish with a sharp eye.
He catches the trembling of small hidden things,
   He tears them in pieces, dropping from the sky:
   Tenderness and pity the land will deny,
Where life is but nourished from water and rock
A hardy adventure, full of fear and shock.

Time has never journeyed to this lost land,
   Crakeberries and heather bloom out of date,
The rocks jut, the streams flow singing on either hand,
   Careless if the season be early or late.
   The skies wander overhead, now blue, now slate:
Winter would be known by his cold cutting snow
If June did not borrow his armour also.

Yet this is my country beloved by me best,
   The first land that rose from Chaos and the Flood,
Nursing no fat valleys for comfort and rest,
   Trampled by no hard hooves, stained with no blood.
   Bold immortal country whose hill tops have stood
Strongholds for the proud gods when on earth they go,
Terror for fat burghers in far plains below.[67]

The quiddity of these "rocky acres" is solidly established; their existence seems in no way contingent upon the existence of their perceiver or upon his perceptual focus. Indeed, they are described in terms and in a tone which make their reality seem entirely independent of human contexture. It is precisely the non-human quality of these hills that has seized Graves, and he patently

undertakes to say no more and no less of them than is consonant with their objective reality. Thus, his poetic voice is conspicuously impersonal, pitched to achieve through its delivery a perfectly transparent expression. And, consequently, the considerable force or intensity of the experience defined in the poem appears to derive not from the language but from the conception itself. This was, of course, the unobtrusive style--the freedom from mannerism--that the youthful Graves so admired in Rupert Brooke. Under Georgian influence, Graves early mastered this "dry, flat, natural voice."[68] Critics who comment deploringly on the unlyric plainness of Graves's language have failed to understand that his style of speech in Fairies and Fusiliers and Country Sentiment was a functional requirement of the Georgian conception of realism. Indeed, recent critics have honored Graves for the clarity and precision of his style without realizing how early he commenced to practice that mode of poetic speech and without recognizing under what auspices.[69]

In attempting to gain an unmediated vision of those segments of experience which most powerfully engaged him, Graves endeavored--like his Georgian elders--to find the vantage point between solipsism and conventional wisdom, between diaristic jottings and public oratory, where observation is least obstructed. The opposed perils for the true poet were egocentricity and public service: sentiment and the desire for popular applause. Whether the poet indulged himself or the public, the outcome was likely to be the same: experience converted into sentimentality and abstraction. Therefore, part of the discipline of the true poet, as Georgianly defined, was to become as wary of his own emotions as of the public's demands upon him.

Since love, childhood, domesticity, the countryside, and war are familiar themes in Graves's early poetry, the risk of sentimentality was certainly present as he wrote. These are surely subjects that have proved too seductive for many poets, subjects that seem almost to require immoderate emotional response, idealization, great rhetorical exertions. But, with few exceptions,[70] Graves consistently revealed a distrust of the simple lyrical emotion. As a check against sentimentality, Graves frequently employed, particularly in his ballads,[71] a kind of Hardyesque irony of circumstance to preserve the complex particularity of experience, its conflictive and asymmetrical character. Even more typically, as in "Rocky Acres," he relied heavily upon precise diction and a studiously impersonal tone to convey truthfully the object of his vision. Graves's intense attachment to the Welsh highlands ("my country beloved by me best") might easily have led to a fervidly subjective, self-dramatizing poetic statement: a stream of personal images blurring the actual relationship between the speaker and the terrain by sentimentally equating them. But Graves recognized the paradoxical sense in which his attachment to that wild, uncompromised landscape was in part a function of its absolute indifference to him. He, accordingly, signaled this element of opposition in the relationship by opening the final stanza with the concessive "Yet." The relation of speaker to terrain is complicated, disturbing, productive of terror as well as sublimity; and the young Georgian poet sought his poem in the concrete particulars of that unharmonious experience.

Writing at a time when the tradition of didactic verse--as exemplified by Victorian public bards--was still in force, Graves was well aware of how the true poet's attention to the data of experience might be distracted by his responsiveness to conventional literary expectations. Graves expressed this concern in a letter to Marsh in 1919:

> I feel that this is one of the many occasions on which I've finished a poem decently, and then moralized on for another verse unnecessarily. I am so terrified of being didactic.[72]

His experience in the trenches had made him acutely conscious of the discrepancy

between reality and public sentiment.[73] On convalescent leave from the trenches, he had found the civilian patriots at home talking "newspaper language,"[74] talking of the motives and costs of the war in remote abstractions. And, of course, he had noted the unqualified popular success of those poets who had been prompt to supply the public with the rhetorical formulas it approved: loyalty to God and country, the nobility of personal sacrifice, the lofty virtues of British civilization. At this early point in his career, Graves already regarded such writers not as poets but as rhetoricians, musical dispensers of approved doctrine. Lacking sufficient independence and dedication to the distinctive purpose of poetry, they had become paid spokesmen for the conventional pieties. Such behavior, Graves observed in his "Epitaph on an Unfortunate Artist," marked the death of a poet, his abandonment of the true poet's vocation:

> He found a formula for drawing comic rabbits:
> This formula for drawing comic rabbits paid.
> So in the end he could not change the tragic habits
> This formula for drawing comic rabbits made.[75]

Out of the concern to engage experience directly and truthfully that figured so prominently in the Georgian scheme of poetic values, Graves drew back sharply from doctrinizing and, indeed, from all large generalizations, i.e., translations of experience into abstraction. G. S. Fraser has correctly remarked of Graves's poems that they ". . .almost instinctively resist the process of generalisation and simplification which is part of all exposition. They will not reduce to a formula."[76] And, consistent with their view of realism, this is just the test that Marsh's Georgians would have regarded as one of the most appropriate and valid measures of true poetry. In "The Lord Chamberlain Tells of a Famous Meeting," Graves cautioned his readers against the meretricious inflations of "elegant essayists, vagabond dramatists, /Authentic and approved biographers, /Solemn annalists, allegorical /Painters" who obscure the experiential meaning of human events.[77] Like Abercrombie and other members of the Marsh group, Graves maintained that it was the distinctive purpose of the artist to attend to reality at the level of experience, to look directly at the events themselves, and to allow neither self-indulgence nor public expectations to deflect and falsify his vision. The true poet is not a teacher; he is "a blind groper after truth"[78] who, with modesty and independence, refuses to place either himself or his audience before his plain duty.

Thus, anxious to confront reality item by item, to experience its shapes and textures, to apprehend its particular forms, and to grasp its essential meanings as fully and directly as his sensibility would allow, Graves endeavored--like Davies and de la Mare--to approximate the innocent eye of childhood. And he equated childhood not with placid simplicity but with pre-categorized, unformulated experience. He identified childhood, as in "The Cool Web,"[79] with the intensity and terror of experience before it has been cooled by language, i.e., made dully familiar and "rational" by repeated usage. For the Georgian, childhood was hardly refuge from disorder and fear; it was, rather, the violence of first experience, the uncertainty of a world encountered without preconception, nakedly. As a poet, Graves tried to reenter a world without abstraction, where the wonderful and the terrifying and the chaotic existed as genuine facts available in their full particularity. He sought entry into a cognitive world where events registered on the poet's consciousness in their noumenal thisness, without reference to goodness and badness or other judgments of experience. Accordingly, he attended carefully to his own recollections of childhood and to those literary forms which approach most nearly to the child's angle of vision, the nursery rhyme and the ballad.

Significantly, the many poems which treat of childhood experience in Graves's early volumes deal directly and concretely with both the joys and the

aches of existence. In "The Poet in the Nursery," Graves attempts to articulate the transporting access of power that accompanies the self-conscious discovery of language:

But suddenly I saw the bright green cover
    Of a thin pretty book right down below;
I snatched it up and turned the pages over,
    To find it full of poetry, and so
Put it down my neck with quick hands like a lover,
    And turned to watch if the old man saw it go.

The book was full of funny muddling mazes,
    Each rounded off into a lovely song,
And most extraordinary and monstrous phrases
    Knotted with rhymes like a slave-driver's thong,
And metre twisting like a chain of daisies
    With great big splendid words a sentence long.[80]

On the other hand, in "A Child's Nightmare" Graves attempts to define the experience of obsessive nightmare, the way in which one's earliest fright informs subsequent fears:

Through long nursery nights he stood
By my bed unwearying,
Loomed gigantic, formless, queer,
Purring in my haunted ear
That same hideous nightmare thing,
Talking, as he lapped my blood,
In a voice cruel and flat,
Saying for ever, 'Cat! . . . Cat! . . . Cat! . . .'[81]

Graves clearly regarded childhood as illustrative of a peculiarly valuable level of cognition at which violence and tragedy were as concretely known as summer idylls, at which apparently supernatural events existed as believably as natural events. Thus, he conceived of innocence as referring not to the conception of childhood experience as narrowly restricted and untroubled, but as referring to the quality of a childlike engagement with experience, the capacity to respond with all the intensity of a fresh and uninstructed sensibility to whatever is present for inspection. In lamenting the lost world of childhood, therefore, Graves was not rehearsing a familiar sentimental fiction. He was, rather, invoking the sharp appetite for direct experience that so rarely survives in the coarsened sensibility produced by repletion and custom:

The child alone a poet is:
Spring and Fairyland are his.
Truth and Reason show but dim,
And all's poetry with him.
Rhyme and music flow in plenty
For the lad of one-and-twenty,
But Spring for him is no more now
Than daisies to a munching cow;
Just a cheery pleasant season,
Daisy buds to live at ease on.
He's forgotten how he smiled
And shrieked at snowdrops when a child,
Or wept one evening secretly
For April's glorious misery.
Wisdom made him old and wary
Banishing the Lords of Faery.
Wisdom made a breach and battered

Babylon to bits: she scattered
To all the hedges and ditches
All our nursery gnomes and witches.[82]

As these verses suggest, Graves's fondness for nursery rhymes was functionally related to his Georgian conception of realism. He regarded the authors of nursery rhymes as indifferent--like children--to personal mannerism, to public fashion, to "high seriousness." Properly anonymous, singing only when genuinely compelled by the pressure of thought and feeling, these authors had attended passionately to the elemental joys and terrors--both rational and nonrational, material and immaterial--that constitute human experience itself. It was in this spirit that he addressed to Marsh "A Ballad of Nursery Rhyme":

Strawberries that in gardens grow
Are plump and juicy fine,
But sweeter far as wise men know
Spring from the woodland vine.

No need for bowl or silver spoon,
Sugar or spice or cream,
Has the wild berry plucked in June
Beside the trickling stream.

One such to melt at the tongue's root,
Confounding taste with scent,
Beats a full peck of garden fruit:
Which points my argument.

May sudden justice overtake
And snap the froward pen,
That old and palsied poets shake
Against the minds of men.

Blasphemers trusting to hold caught
In far-flung webs of ink,
The utmost ends of human thought
Till nothing's left to think.

But may the gift of heavenly peace
And glory for all time
Keep the boy Tom who tending geese
First made the nursery rhyme.

. . . .

Carving with a sharp pointed stone
On a broad slab of slate
The famous lives of Jumping Joan,
Dan Fox and Greedy Kate.

Rhyming of wolves and bears and birds,
Spain, Scotland, Babylon,
That sister Kate might learn the words
To tell to toddling John.

But Kate who could not stay content

To learn her lesson pat
New beauty to the rough lines lent
By changing this or that.

And she herself set fresh things down
In corners of her slate,
Of lambs and lanes and London town.
God's blessing fall on Kate!

. . . .

From mouth to mouth told and retold
By children sprawled at ease,
Before the fire in winter's cold
In June, beneath tall trees.

Till though long lost are stone and slate,
Though the brook no more runs,
And dead long time are Tom, John, Kate,
Their sons and their sons' sons,

Yet as when Time with stealthy tread
Lays the rich garden waste
The woodland berry ripe and red
Fails not in scent or taste,

So these same rhymes shall still be told
To children yet unborn,
While false philosophy growing old
Fades and is killed by scorn.[83]

It was presumably early poems like this one that first prompted critics to speak of Graves's romantic escapism. Indeed, "A Ballad of Nursery Rhyme" does appear to contrast naturalness and artificiality, the wild and the cultivated, in the manner commonly attributed to the Romantic poets. However, as its dedication to Marsh implies, the poem may be more meaningfully interpreted in the context of Georgian poetics. The cultivated fruit suggests poetry made attractive for market and, in consequence, somewhat adulterated in that it requires the addition of sweets and spices, depends for its effect upon extrinsic sources of appeal. That is, its attractiveness derives importantly from qualities not inherent in the poem itself, as in the appeal of Henry More's poetry to Platonists and of Browning's poetry to Victorian Christians. Graves is actually contrasting "pure" poetry, i.e., the direct expression of quintessential human experiences (like love and lust and terror) through unmannered language and insistent rhythms, with "philosophical" or "academic" poetry, i.e., the attempt to disguise doctrine as poetry. The former is held to be rooted in the essential experience of men, so that it exercises a timeless fascination upon those who would only ask of poetry what it is uniquely able to provide. The latter fades on the page with the decline and disappearance of its extrinsic value. The Georgians were anxious to separate poetry from doctrine, the poet from the rhetorician, in order to restore to poetry the sources of its intrinsic value in quotidian experience, impersonally and unpretentiously stated, as in nursery rhyme and ballad.

Graves's obvious attachment to the nursery rhyme and the popular ballad points to yet another feature of Georgian realism. Like Brooke, Bottomley, Abercrombie, de la Mare, and Davies, Graves distinguished between the close, unmediated scrutiny of experience that leads to honest insight, on the one hand,

and the mere recording of shapeless trivialities, on the other.[84] The true poet spoke only when inspired, when his vision was seized and his sensibility profoundly excited by a perception of the meanings concretely known through associated items of experience. Thus, Graves's best early poems, like "Rocky Acres," are both concrete and a-historical; they manifest a wariness of generalization and abstraction, but strive nevertheless to register elemental truths. The fears and shocks and terrors in "Rocky Acres" are genuinely timeless, rooted in the physical facts of height and hardness and weather and in the feeling of vulnerability which these facts engender in all but a few men. It is the essential character of that specific landscape, stripped of personal conventional sentiments, that Graves meant to convey. And it is the essential character of war, not the transient details of twentieth-century combat, that he sought to express in "Dead Cow Farm":

An ancient saga tells us how
In the beginning the First Cow
(For nothing living yet had birth
But Elemental Cow on earth)
Began to lick cold stones and mud:
Under her warm tongue flesh and blood
Blossomed, a miracle to believe:
And so was Adam born, and Eve.
Here now is chaos once again,
Primeval mud, cold stones and rain.
Here flesh decays and blood drips red,
And the Cow's dead, the old Cow's dead.[85]

In this poem, through a mixture of realistic tone and mythic reference, the completeness of war's destruction has been imaged with a degree of force and precision rarely approached by the exponents of a more literal verisimilitude.

It should be added that, like the best of Marsh's original company, Graves seldom confounded essentiality with simplicity. However, the employment by the Georgians of a colloquial diction and syntax, their disposition--like Robinson and Frost in America--to restrict themselves to thoroughly dramatic presentations of experience, and their attention to elemental truths inclined many of their critics to charge them with simple-mindedness. In fact, the smooth, transparent surface of Graves's poetry--like that of his Georgian elders--is deceptive. These early poems reveal a reality in which violence and dark intention coexist with order and benevolence, a world of antinomies.[86] The portrait of human experience that emerges from these poems is fundamentally conflictive: the elemental truths they express are complex, cross-grained. Like Hardy, young Graves was alert to the pleasures as well as the pains of human experience and did not regard them as evenly balanced. Like Hardy, Graves found sexual love an arresting instance of the complexity and difficulty of human experience, a concrete yet generalized demonstration that life is fundamentally a perplexing admixture of tragedy and ecstasy. Graves early recognized that love is both a triumphant and a disastrous experience, the occasion of betrayal no less than of self-sacrifice. He recognized the elemental tensions underlying sexual relations, and he regarded poetry as both the discipline of integrity and the form of expression by means of which such complicated perceptions might be stated most truthfully.

About one-fourth of the poems in Country Sentiment and one-half of those in The Pier-Glass are, indeed, love poems, ostensibly simple lyrics and ballads. But hardly one is without its emotional hesitancies, its wryness of tone, its ironic sense of love's uncertainty and pain. It is true that Charles Williams remarked almost forty years ago that Graves's apparently simple poems are usually complex, and Ronald Gaskell has more recently noted the complexity

of Graves's love poems.[87] Albert Friedman has called attention to the complicated effect of "planned incongruity" that was produced by Graves's introduction of ironic language and perspective into his early ballads.[88] However, relatively few critics of Graves's early love poems appear to have grasped their experiential resonance, their mingled lights and darks.[89] Like "A Frosty Night," "Apples and Water" is a ballad in dialogue form in which mother and daughter are juxtaposed in order to counterpoint the insatiate desire arising from the anticipation of love with the sense of repellence to which love gives way in time:

Dust in a cloud, blinding weather,
   Drums that rattle and roar!
A mother and daughter stood together
   Beside their cottage door.

'Mother, the heavens are bright like brass,
   The dust is shaken high,
With labouring breath the soldiers pass,
   Their lips are cracked and dry.'

'Mother, I'll throw them apples down,
   I'll bring them pails of water.'
The mother turned with an angry frown
   Holding back her daughter.

'But mother, see, they faint with thirst,
   They march away to die,'
'Ah, sweet, had I but known at first
   Their throats are always dry.'

'There is no water can supply them
   In western streams that flow,
There is no fruit can satisfy them
   On orchard trees that grow.'

'Once in my youth I gave, poor fool,
   A soldier apples and water,
So may I die before you cool
   Your father's drouth, my daughter.'[90]

The grim situational irony with which the poem ends is specific enough, and yet it points to no local or evitable betrayal. Rather, it suggests the certainty of change in all sexual relationships and the inevitability of complicated aches arising from these changes. At the same time, "A Frosty Night" and "Apples and Water" remain, with equal certainty, celebrations of love's power. Thus, far from regarding love and other experiences central to our humanity in simple and idyllic terms, Graves typically approached them--even when a young poet--with an awareness of their complexity. Taken singly or collectively, poems like "One Hard Look," "True Johnny," "Advice to Lovers," "Loving Henry," "Brittle Bones," "The Cupboard," "Pot and Kettle," "Neglectful Edward," and "Vain and Careless" merit a more careful examination of tone and attitude than they have yet received.[91]

Paradoxically, the clarity of Graves's poems may have obscured their complexity of thought and feeling. Under Georgian influence, Graves endeavored to give clear expression to his independent conceptions of experience; consequently, mastery of technique was a functional requirement of the true poet. We can derive some sense of Marsh's view of the relationship between conception and technique from Isaac Rosenberg, who was--at the same time as Graves--receiv-

> As a convenient general rule, Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie has pointed out in his admirable pamphlet 'Poetry and Contemporary Speech,' the poet will always be best advised to choose as the main basis of his diction the ordinary spoken language of his day; the reason being that words grow richer by daily use and take on subtle associations which the artificially bred words of literary or technical application cannot acquire with such readiness; the former have therefore greater poetic possibilities in juxtaposition.[95]

Moreover, as a young poet, Graves used imagery with great economy. As in "Rocky Acres" and "Dead Cow Farm," his imagery is largely concrete, sensuous. Rarely figurative, it seems designed to serve as a close verbal embodiment of experienc nothing more. And Graves's employment of syntax was entirely consistent with hi treatment of diction. He early became an adept of the kind of poetic syntax tha according to Donald Davie, pleases the reader "by the fidelity with which it follows the 'form of thought' in the poet's mind."[96] For example, the open expanse of "Rocky Acres" is appropriately imaged in long lines, all but one terminating naturally with the conclusion of a syntactic unit, so that the rhymed and end-stopped verses introduce no sense of restraint. Graves's mastery of poetic syntax has permitted him to write in strict forms without any observable loss of expressive freedom. Readers of "Rocky Acres" seldom notice that the poem has been written in the rhyme royal stanza.

Finally, Graves's early prosodic practice was similarly related to the effort of Georgian poets to use every linguistic device that might render more exact their expression of experience. Graves understood that the poet who metered his lines had available to him an additional means of fixing the meaning conveyed most tangibly through diction and syntax. He recognized that, by his choice of a particular metrical paradigm and by his introduction of variations into the paradigm, he might subtly amplify the resonance and the immediacy of the poem as an expression of experience. He learned early, like Frost, how to overlay his metrical paradigm with speech rhythms, in order to echo the quality of experience itself. Thus, although his adoption of the rhyme royal stanza in "Rocky Acres" presumably committed him to the use of iambic pentameter lines, the ruggedness and harshness of that refractory terrain disposed him to so "roughen" his iambics as to produce lines which are not easily distinguished from the strong-stress or old native meter of the alliterative tradition. Ronald Gaskell has commented intelligently on Graves's prosodic strategy:

> This playing off of speech rhythm against regular metre is not virtuosity for its own sake. Graves avoids the obvious rhythm not because he finds it uninteresting but because he finds it inexact. The danger of writing in regular metre, and especially of writing in stanzas, is that the particular shape of experience will be lost, will be moulded by the stanza into something more familiar.[97]

That is, without the use of some kind of reasonably stable metrical paradigm in the poem, it is virtually impossible for the poet to make rhythmic variation coherently expressive. And it was for this reason that Graves and the Georgians regarded metrical form as a requirement of poetry. Meter and, indeed, all prosodic devices were not to be employed mechanically in the fashion of academic verse; they were to be varied freely in order to maximize the expressive capacities of language.[98] Graves's admiration of Skelton's poetic independence extended to his technique, which demonstrated to the young Georgian a creative use of form. One of the vulgar errors of English literary history is the attribution of formlessness to Skelton whose "Skeltonics" are irregularly metered and unevenly rhymed. The description of such practices as standing "at the opposite pole from formal

stanzaic poetry"[99] invites misunderstanding. Skelton's "tumbling" verses are in fact metered, but depart freely from their norm in a manner entirely consistent with Skelton's desire to charge his lines with energy and spontaneity. As J. M. Cohen has observed, it was the prosodic example of Skelton that freed Graves early in his career "from the tight iambic convention."[100] It was also in this general connection that Graves expressed approval of de la Mare's handling of prosodic technique, of his willingness to sacrifice euphony to exactness.[101] However, like the rest of the Georgian company, excepting only Monro and Lawrence, Graves was firmly opposed to vers libre:

> The limitation of Vers Libre, which I regard as only our old friend, Prose Poetry, broken up in convenient lengths, seems to be that the poet has not the continual hold over his reader's attention that a regulated (this does not mean altogether 'regular') scheme of verse properly used would give him. . . . my contention is that vers libre has a serious limitation which regulated verse has not. In vers libre there is no natural indication as to how the lines are to be stressed. There are thousands of lines of Walt Whitman's, over the pointing of which, and the intended cadence, elocutionists would disagree; and this seems to be leaving too much to chance.[102]

Several conclusions may be drawn from the study of Graves's early career in relation to Georgian poetry. First, if we look back to the principal features of Graves's reputation, we notice that--far from their being distinctively applicable to him--they may now appear broadly applicable to most of the members of Georgian poetry's first stage. As political liberals and literary reformers, the elder Georgians--no less than Graves--were widely regarded as rebellious and willful, even eccentric as in the case of Davies. As poets, the Georgians cultivated an independent attitude toward the public audience for poetry, subscribed to a primary dedication to poetry itself, and took great pains to master their craft. Thus, in its essential details, the reputation of Robert Graves seems most evidently to be the reputation of a Georgian poet. Next, if we ignore the conventional appraisals of the Georgians and examine their literary orientation in the light of their own writings and of newly available biographical evidence, Graves's genuine collaboration in the first stage of Georgian poetry seems an indisputable fact. Last, some lines of further inquiry into the poetics of Robert Graves would now appear to be these: What were the specific grounds of Graves's movement away from Georgian poetry as, after 1918, its leadership was gradually assumed by Sir John Squire? Was Graves's early commitment to the Georgian poetic a continuing determinant of his poetic theory and practice throughout the succeeding stages of his career? Whether as propounder of a psychoanalytic theory of poetry, as collaborator with Laura Riding, or as a votary of the White Goddess, how far--if at all--has Graves actually deviated from the poetic principles that guided Marsh and his group of liberal Georgians?

* * *

FOOTNOTES

1 Randall Jarrell, "Graves and the White Goddess," Yale Review, XLV (December 1955), 311.

2 Michael Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (London, 1969), p. 271.

3 For an account of the reputation of Georgian poetry, see Myron Simon, The Georgian Poetic, Chapter I (to be published by the University of California Press).

4 Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves, p. 5.

5 See also Hassall's biography of Rupert Brooke (1964) and Robert H. Ross'

The Georgian Revolt (1965). Ross' account of Georgian literary theory has been extended in Myron Simon's "The Georgian Poetic," Papers of the Midwest Modern Language Association, No. 1, 1969, pp. 121-135.

[6] Letter to Edward Marsh, quoted in Christopher Hassall, A Biography of Edward Marsh (New York, 1959), p. 473.

[7] A Biography of Edward Marsh, pp. 252-253.

[8] Ibid., pp. 181, 206.

[9] Ibid., p. 207.

[10] Robert Graves, "Foreword," Collected Poems (New York, 1938), pp. xv-xvi.

[11] Robert Graves, Good-bye to All That (London, 1929), p. 80. Cf. Goodbye to All That, New edition, revised (London, 1957), pp. 44-45.

[12] A Biography of Edward Marsh, p. 286.

[13] Ibid., p. 306.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 345.

[16] Ibid., p. 398.

[17] Ibid., p. 404. In the Marsh papers, now housed in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library, there are holograph copies of more than twenty Graves poems and typescripts of more than forty others, a larger number of poetry manuscripts than is the case with any other poet represented in the Marsh papers. The number of Graves's poetry manuscripts in Marsh's files helps to indicate the extent of Graves's early reliance upon Marsh's criticism.

[18] Ibid., p. 436.

[19] Ibid., p. 437.

[20] Christopher Hassall and Denis Mathews, comps., Eddie Marsh: Sketches for a Composite Literary Portrait of Sir Edward Marsh (London, 1953), p. 26. Although Graves's relations with many of his friends were broken during the late 1920's and 1930's, letters exchanged between Marsh and Laura Riding suggest that Graves continued to regard Marsh cordially and to send him copies of his new books. See the eight letters from Riding to Marsh in the Marsh file in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

[21] Good-bye to All That, p. 187.

[22] Joy Grant, Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop (London, 1967), p. 109. For additional evidence of Marsh's active sponsorship of Graves's first book, see A Biography of Edward Marsh, p. 380. On November 10, 1915, Graves's father wrote Marsh to say that his son had urged him to make Marsh's acquaintance. A short correspondence ensued, between 1915 and 1917, in which it is evident that Graves's father regarded Marsh as a valued collaborator in his own efforts to launch his son's poetic career. See the letters from Alfred Perceval Graves to Marsh in the Berg Collection of the New York Public Library.

[23] A Biography of Edward Marsh, p. 380.

[24] Ibid., p. 485.

[25] Ibid., p. 380.

[26] Ibid., p. 443.

[27] Ibid., p. 447.

[28] Good-bye to All That, p. 102.

[29] Ibid., p. 307.

[30] Ibid., p. 29.

[31] Goodbye to All That (1957), p. 42. Graves has elsewhere stated that he last attended church on Good Friday, 1916. See Robert Graves, But It Still Goes On (New York, 1931), p. 104.

[32] The Poetical Works of Rupert Brooke, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1946), pp. 35-36.

[33] Robert Graves, Fairies and Fusiliers (London, 1917), pp. 11-13, 68-69. "Heaven" appeared in the second volume of Georgian Poetry, and "Goliath and

David" and "A Boy in Church" in the third, which will suggest one line of thematic continuity in the first three volumes of *Georgian Poetry*.

[34]*Good-bye to All That*, pp. 354, 355, 364, 396.

[35]*Ibid*., p. 57.

[36]*Ibid*., p. 58. The poem is very likely "Rocky Acres." See Robert Graves, *Country Sentiment* (New York, 1920), pp. 34-35. "Rocky Acres" was first published in the fourth volume of *Georgian Poetry* (1919).

[37]*Good-bye to All That*, p. 253.

[38]*Ibid*., p. 254.

[39]*Ibid*., p. 316.

[40]Douglas Day, *Swifter Than Reason* (Chapel Hill, 1963), p. 19.

[41]"To an Ungentle Critic," in *Fairies and Fusiliers* (London, 1917), pp. 1-2.

[42]"A First Review," in *Country Sentiment* (New York, 1920), p. 104.

[43]*Good-bye to All That*, p. 342.

[44]*Ibid*., p. 439.

[45]Robert Graves, "Foreword," *The Owl*, No. 1 (May 1919), p. 3.

[46]Robert Graves, *The Crowning Privilege* (London, 1955), p. 113.

[47]Robert Graves, *Collected Poems: 1914-1947* (London, 1948), p. 204.

[48]*Good-bye to All That*, p. 381.

[49]*Ibid*., p. 388.

[50]*Country Sentiment*, pp. 31-33.

[51]*Good-bye to All That*, p. 394.

[52]Richard J. Stonesifer, *W. H. Davies* (London, 1963), p. 112. Graves reports this anecdote in *Good-bye to All That*, p. 394; cf. the revised edition (1957), p. 284.

[53]See Henry W. Wells, *New Poets from Old* (New York, 1940), p. 143; Philip Henderson, "Introduction," *The Complete Poems of John Skelton* (London, 1959), p. vi; A. R. Heiserman, *Skelton and Satire* (Chicago, 1961), p. 9; John Press, *Rule and Energy* (London, 1963), p. 24.

[54]Robert Graves, *Oxford Addresses on Poetry* (London, 1962), p. 5. In *Good-bye to All That*, quoting from a letter he had written in France on June 24, 1915, Graves cited a verse of Skelton's (p. 157). Thus, the precise date of his discovery of Skelton is not clear.

[55]*Good-bye to All That*, p. 385.

[56]"John Skelton," pp. 41-43.

[57]*Oxford Addresses on Poetry*, p. 5.

[58]William Nelson, *John Skelton, Laureate* (New York, 1939), p. 237.

[59]*Ibid*., pp. 235-236. John Holloway's essay on Skelton also suggests the nature of his appeal to Graves. See *The Charted Mirror* (London, 1960), pp. 3-24.

[60]Robert Graves, *Over the Brazier* (London, 1916), p. 13. Graves reprinted the poem under the same title in *Fairies and Fusiliers*; but when he included it in his *Poems: 1914-1926* (New York, 1929), he changed the title to "In Spite." It may reasonably be assumed that the alteration was dictated by the ambiguity of the original title, for by "Free Verse" Graves did not mean *vers libre*. Rather, the title referred to that poetry which eschews academic uniformity in favor of direct and honest expression.

[61]*Fairies and Fusiliers*, p. 33.

[62]Ronald Gaskell, "The Poetry of Robert Graves," *Critical Quarterly*, III (Autumn 1961), 219.

[63]Cf. *Good-bye to All That*, p. 306.

[64]*Country Sentiment*, p. 98.

[65]Jarrell, "Graves and the White Goddess," p. 306.

[66]*Good-bye to All That*, p. 309.

[67]*Country Sentiment*, pp. 34-35.

[68]G. S. Fraser, "The Reputation of Robert Graves," *Shenandoah*, XIII (Winter

1962), 21. Fraser states that Graves "hates poetry that calls attention to the fact that it is 'literature,' hates any hint of pompousness in poetry. . . . He sees the poet as a humble man. . . . The idea of the poet as a great man, or the cult of the great poem, he will have nothing to do with."

[69]See, for example, Donald Davie, "The Toneless Voice of Robert Graves," The Listener, LXII (July 2, 1959), 11-13. Only C. K. Stead, in The New Poetic (London, 1964), has suggested the role of the Georgians in the formation of Graves's style.

[70]See "Double Red Daisies" in Fairies and Fusiliers, pp. 46-47; and "The Patchwork Bonnet" in The Pier-Glass (New York, 1921), pp. 42-43.

[71]See "A Frosty Night," "Apples and Water," and "The Cupboard" in Country Sentiment, pp. 13-14, 46-47, 58-59.

[72]Quoted in A Biography of Edward Marsh, p. 471.

[73]Good-bye to All That, pp. 240-242.

[74]Ibid., p. 283.

[75]Robert Graves, On English Poetry (London, 1922), p. 111.

[76]"The Reputation of Robert Graves," p. 25.

[77]Whipperginny (London, 1923), pp. 44-47.

[78]On English Poetry, p. 99.

[79]Poems: 1914-1926 (New York, 1929), pp. 215-216.

[80]Fairies and Fusiliers, pp. 75-76.

[81]Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[82]Ibid., pp. 14-15.

[83]Country Sentiment, pp. 72-75.

[84]In On English Poetry, Graves says, "One of the chief problems of the art of poetry is to decide what are the essentials of the image that has formed in your mind; the accidental has to be eliminated and replaced by the essential" (p. 128).

[85]Fairies and Fusiliers, p. 10.

[86]See "The God Called Poetry" in Country Sentiment, pp. 31-33; and also note Graves's description of the contents of this volume in the opening lines of its final poem, "A First Review": "Love, Fear and Hate and Childish Toys/Are here descreetly blent. . ." (p. 104).

[87]Charles Williams, Poetry at Present (Oxford, 1930), pp. 202-203; Gaskell, "The Poetry of Robert Graves," pp. 215-216.

[88]Albert B. Friedman, The Ballad Revival (Chicago, 1961), p. 341.

[89]Even critics generally favorable to Graves have described his nursery-rhyme poems and ballads as simplistic and escapist. See, for example, J. M. Cohen, Robert Graves (New York, 1961), pp. 18, 37.

[90]Country Sentiment, pp. 13-14, 46-47.

[91]Ibid., passim. See also "The Troll's Nosegay," "The Finding of Love," "Reproach," "Morning Phoenix," "Catherine Drury," "The Kiss," and "Lost Love" in The Pier-Glass, passim.

[92]Isaac Rosenberg, quoted in "Introductory Memoir" by Laurence Binyon, in Poems by Isaac Rosenberg, ed. Gordon Bottomley (London, 1922), pp. 36-37.

[93]Good-bye to All That, pp. 388-389.

[94]On English Poetry, p. 93.

[95]Ibid., p. 42.

[96]Donald Davie, Articulate Energy (London, 1955), p. 68.

[97]"The Poetry of Robert Graves," p. 219.

[98]See "Free Verse" in Fairies and Fusiliers, pp. 82-84.

[99]Nelson, John Skelton, Laureate, p. 87.

[100]Robert Graves, p. 23.

[101]Good-bye to All That, p. 395.

[102]On English Poetry, pp. 45-46.

University of California, Irvine

Glanville-Hicks's Nausicaa and Graves (Higginson D76)*

by Alan M. Cohn

Higginson D76 records an "apparently unpublished...libretto...by Graves" for Peggy Glanville-Hicks's opera Nausicaa, based on his Homer's Daughter. Indeed, the score of the opera has not been published, nor, according to Belwin-Mills,[1] the music house from whom facsimiles are available on rental for production, are there plans to publish it. The libretto alone, however, has been published; that it is by Graves is questionable.

The opera premiered at the Athens Festival on 19 August 1961, and a recording of excerpts based on this production was issued on a single 12" LP about 1964 by Composers Recordings Inc. (CRI 175). Included with this recording is an insert containing the full text of the libretto. The insert consists of eight unnumbered pages measuring approximately 12" square. Following some preliminary matter (including brief biographical sketches of the cast, the conductor, the director, the designer, Glanville-Hicks, and Graves, plus a "Synopsis of the Story" and "A Note on the Libretto and the Music"), the libretto occupies the last four three-column pages of the insert. The episodes included on the recording (a little less than two-thirds of the total) are printed in italics, the remainder in roman. There are a few typos (like reversed lines at the beginning of I, i) and a number of differences between the text as printed and as sung, mostly the inclusion or omission of an occasional word. It might also be noted that the choral episodes are sung in Greek on the recording but given in English in the printed text.

The dating of the record and, thus, of the libretto is based on several facts. The Library of Congress card for the recording gives 1964 in brackets, and the earliest review I have found appears in the American Record Guide for May 1964.[2] On the other hand, the record is announced in the "New Listings" column of the Schwann Long Playing Record Catalog in Dec. 1963. We at least seem to have a terminus a quo and a terminus ad quem for this first and only edition.[3]

Whether Graves is to be considered the librettist is a vexed question. Here are some of the raw materials out of which the answer must be framed:

1) In very small type at the bottom of the second page of the folder accompanying the recording is a brief note about broadcasting rights, etc., in the course of which appears the statement: "In all reference to the libretto, credit must read: The libretto for Nausicaa has been arranged from the novel Homer's Daughter by Robert Graves." This is at least ambiguous.

2) The piano-vocal score of Nausicaa is entered in the Catalog of Copyright Entries: Music for July-Dec. 1963 (© 25 July 1963), and part of the entry reads "...after the novel 'Homer's daughter' by Robert Graves, libretto arr.(anged) by Robert Graves..." The "arr." is part of the Copyright Office's formula and is scarcely illuminating.

3) Nausicaa appears again in the next volume of the Catalog of Copyright Entries: Music, for Jan.-June 1964, on the occasion of the issuance of the CRI recording (the copyright date is 31 Dec. 1963, which tends to support our terminus a quo if just barely), apparently for the specific purpose of copyrighting the libretto since it is to be published with the recording. The language now reads "...libretto after the novel 'Homer's daughter' by Robert Graves... © on complete libretto; Peggy Glanville-Hicks..." Second thoughts?

4) In her "Note on the Libretto and the Music" in the record notes, Glanville-Hicks writes, "The libretto for Nausicaa was planned and the text started in the summer of 1956, when I spent several months on the island of Mallorca working with Robert Graves. The text was completed in New York during the fall of 1957, and revised during the following summer as the writing of the music

*Footnotes begin on page 73.

progressed and the form of the work took final shape." This seems to point more toward some kind of collaborative effort.

5) A few months after its premiere, Glanville-Hicks writes at length on Nausicaa for Opera News. She discusses "...how I came to choose a Greek subject, to live in Greece, to seek out Robert Graves for a libretto..." Greek drama, a logical source for a text, did not meet her requirements. But, "One day, Robert Graves' novel Homer's Daughter came to hand; after an exchange of letters, I emerged from a summer in Mallorca with the first draft of a libretto for Nausicaa."[4] Collaboration seems to be indicated once again and to be primarily at the first draft level.

6) In the introduction to his Composers Since 1900: A Biographical and Critical Guide, David Ewen describes his method of compiling his data by interviewing and/or corresponding directly with the composers who are to figure in his book.[5] Of Nausicaa he says, "The text, written by the composer, came out of Robert Graves' novel Homer's Daughter..."[6]

On balance, then, the evidence seems to support crediting Glanville-Hicks with the finished libretto, albeit with help from Graves, (and probably, as we shall see, from yet a third party), especially in the earlier stages.

Additional evidence for this interpretation can be gathered from a manuscript in SIU's Graves collection. Accompanying this manuscript is a holograph draft of a brief, undated covering letter addressed to "Alastair," who would seem, according to letters from about this time in Ellsworth Mason's[7] collection, to be the poet Alastair Reid. Though no date appears in the draft, one can rather certainly be assigned to the cover-letter. Graves ends by telling his correspondent that his son William has passed his O Level exams at Oundle (and adds a parental "thank God"), a public school in Peterborough which William was attending. According to Oundle's present Headmaster, William took and passed his O Level exams in seven of eight subjects in 1956.[8] Such exams are generally given in the summer with results available in the early fall, which should, therefore, fix the time of the "Alastair" letter. A dating of fall 1956 tallies with Glanville-Hicks's statement that she "emerged from a summer (of 1956) in Mallorca with the first draft" in hand.

The five-page manuscript itself contains material which appears in the final libretto as the Prologue. In the covering letter to "Alastair," Graves instructs him to "Please revise Nausicaa." Graves further tells him what to do if he shortens Phemius's song and which section "is the best omitted." The manuscript, also in Graves's hand, is heavily corrected in places and is obviously a rough draft from which a fair copy would have been made. It runs to approximately ninety-eight lines, though it is hard to say with real exactitude because of the many corrections and additions in places. In the libretto as published, the Prologue has been more than cut in half, finally totaling forty-two lines. Some of Graves's language from the manuscript remains, but the effort clearly has been to pare the text to the minimum size necessary for the telling of the story.[9]

Whether this trimming was done by Reid or by Glanville-Hicks -- or indeed by Graves himself -- it is apparent that it was done to meet the composer's requisites. In her Opera News article, Glanville-Hicks reports that, having determined on a Greek theme for her next opera, she naturally enough, "turned first to ancient Greek drama," finding, however, that "these texts proved too wordy for librettos..."[10] And so, obviously, was Graves's original version of the Prologue. It is little wonder, of course, that the composer should have better than the poet, a sense of the brevity necessary to prevent a modestly conceived opera from assuming the proportions of a Wagnerian behemoth.

In Homer's Daughter, Nausicaa says of her finished work, "After all, Phemius is a professional bard and I a mere interloper and a woman; and we had several serious tiffs while I was composing it."[11] But apparently Glanville-

Hicks and Graves had no such tiffs, even though she seems to have kept in touch with him about the opera. The decision to have the choral passages sung in Greek at the Athens premiere, for example, was based in part on the fact that the members of the chorus knew no English. Additionally, however, "Robert Graves himself loved the idea and gave it his blessing."[12] And it is surely only an accident that he looks a little grim in the photograph of Graves and Glanville-Hicks at that successful first performance.[13]

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

FOOTNOTES.

[1]In a letter to me of 12 February 1973 from John Sweeney, in charge of Belwin-Mills's Serious Music Division.

[2]P(hilip) L. M(iller), American Record Guide, 30 (May 1964), 844, 846.

[3]The recording is last entered in the Schwann Catalog for December 1970. According to the groundrules for this invaluable monthly "records-in-print," removal from the list signals that the disc is no longer available from the manufacturer.

[4]"At the Source," Opera News, 26 (16 Dec. 1961), 9-12.

[5](New York: H. W. Wilson, 1969), p. (v).

[6]Ibid., p. 234.

[7]To whom thanks for help.

[8]Letter to me of 19 April 1973 from B. M. W. Trapnell. I am very grateful to Dr. Trapnell, and also to Lawrence Dennis, for help.

[9]This manuscript, incidentally, is not to be confused with the one reported in the first issue of Focus as an "Unpublished, untitled libretto (3 acts)" in the SIU-C collection. That one, almost definitely, was written for Mrs. Wyndham Knatchbull (1863-1951), who was known professionally by her maiden name, Dora Bright.

[10]Op. cit., p. 11.

[11](New York: Doubleday, 1955), p. 279.

[12]Glanville-Hicks, op. cit., p. 13.

[13]Ibid.