

*THE ROBERT GRAVES
REVIEW*

Volume 1, Issue 1
Summer 2021

The Robert Graves Society

Editor: Michael Joseph (USA)

Associate Editors: Alicja Bemben (Poland), Lucia Graves (UK), Patrick Villa (UK)

Bibliography Editor: Carl Hahn (USA)

Associate Poetry Editors: Fran Brearton (Northern Ireland), Dunstan Ward (France)

Editorial Board: Fran Brearton (Northern Ireland), Robert Davis (Scotland), Carl Hahn (USA), Michael Irwin (UK), Anett Jessop (USA), John Kelly (UK), Alice Hughes Kersnowski (USA), Frank Kersnowski (USA), Grevel Lindop (UK), Patrick McGuinness (UK), Charles Mundy (UK), Chris Nicholson (UK), Paul O'Prey (UK), John Woodrow Presley (USA), Juana María Seguí Aznar (Spain)

Production and DTP: Michael Joseph

This publication is financed by the Robert Graves Society. Its primary referential version is the electronic one.

Online ISSN: 2635-0904

Print ISSN: 2635-0890

Postal address:
St. John's College
St. Giles
Oxford
OX1 3JP

Contact information:
Michael Joseph
mjoseph@rutgers.edu

Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-SA 4.0)



Covert art – Robert Graves beside olive tree in Deyá, 1969, photograph by Lloyd Borgess (1928-2017). Original photograph in the University of Victoria Library Special Collections, Robert Graves Collection, SC050.

CONTENTS

Editor's Introduction

<i>Michael Joseph.....</i>	i
----------------------------	---

CRITICAL STUDIES ↗

The 'Reserve of Superstition': Graves, Coleridge, and the Poetry of Mystery

<i>Gregory Leadbetter</i>	1
---------------------------------	---

What Handwashing and Social Distancing in the Times of Corona

Remind Us: The Left Hand is as Vital as the Right

<i>Devindra Kohli</i>	15
-----------------------------	----

William Nicholson and The Pirate Twins

<i>Marilynn S. Olson.....</i>	25
-------------------------------	----

Robert Graves's Favourite Poem? The One that Saved his Life

<i>Paul O'Prey.....</i>	51
-------------------------	----

Drawing Music from Penny Fiddles, or, a Biographical Account of Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke's Secret Lives as Children's Poets with a Look at their Neglected Masterworks, *The Penny Fiddle* and *I Am! Says the Lamb*, along with a Few Other Things'

<i>Joseph T. Thomas, Jr.....</i>	59
----------------------------------	----

Never-Begotten Perfect Daughters: Laura Riding's and Mina Loy's Steinian Inheritances

<i>Eva Isherwood-Wallace.....</i>	89
-----------------------------------	----

The Claudian Dilogy and its Early Criticism

<i>Alicja Bemben.....</i>	107
---------------------------	-----

A Different Look for 'The Face in the Mirror'

<i>Michael Joseph.....</i>	121
----------------------------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY ↗

The Plague of Modern Scholarship (Theses and Dissertations on the Subject of Robert Graves)	
<i>Carl Hahn</i>	157
The Ur-Text to ‘The Country Dance’: An Unrecorded Poem	
<i>Carl Hahn and Michael Joseph</i>	189

NOTES ↗

Robert Graves Trusts and Related	
<i>William Graves, MBE</i>	195
Atlantis, Lake Tritonis and Pharos	
<i>Oliver D. Smith</i>	207

POEMS ↗

<i>Michael Longley</i>	
Dartford Warbler	213
Plovers	214
<i>Ruth Fainlight</i>	
She Be Me	215
<i>Grevel Lindop</i>	
Farewell	217
Scrimshaw	218
Witch Bottle.....	219
<i>Paul O’Prey</i>	
The Grieving Saint	220
The Night-Cocklers	221

Linda Morales Caballero

Pas De Deux	223
So Much	224
Visit	225

Sean O'Brien

Flying the Flag.....	226
Star of Bethlehem.....	228

Poets in this Issue	229
---------------------------	-----

Introduction

Michael Joseph

As many of you are aware, The Robert Graves Society has been publishing a journal since 1996. *Gravesiana: The Journal of The Robert Graves Society*, an offspring of the two centenary conferences held in Palma and Oxford, continued a run of journals about Robert Graves that began during his lifetime, in 1972. *The Robert Graves Review* succeeds *Gravesiana*.

Retiring *Gravesiana* was a gradual process begun in 2016 when Charles Mundye, then incoming Society President, suggested a new title that more clearly asserted the journal's identity as a vehicle for contemporary scholarship would better fit our purpose. Wanting to avert potential reference problems, we chose first to complete *Gravesiana* volume 4, begun under Dunstan Ward's editorship in 2014. After publishing the last issue in summer 2020, the Society pondered name alternatives at a virtual meeting the following December. *The Robert Graves Review* was suggested, warmly received and after some reflection and prayer, ratified: the name change was announced in February.

In addition to the journal's name, we have renovated our delivery system. While we continue to deliver the journal as individual downloadable essays in PDF format, we are now offering under an open access policy texts readable by web browsers, the main feature of our new website, engineered by Philip Graves. The new website, part of a larger Society website initiative described below in William Graves's 'Robert Graves Trusts and Related', will make submitting and reviewing texts for publication easier, and give readers quicker access to more information about the journal; and it will enable us to respond better to changing technologies and enhancements. We would like to extend to Philip our heartfelt gratitude for generously donating his wizardly skills to our enterprise. As well as an education, it has been a great pleasure for

us working with him over the last five months and watching a premier website take shape under his hands.

Readers will notice that we have also expanded our editorial staff and board. Alicja Bemben, a literature scholar at the University of Silesia has joined our cohort of Associate Editors, Lucia Graves and Patrick J. Villa. Carl Hahn, a Graves bibliographer, has become Bibliography Editor, and former Society presidents Fran Brearton and Dunstan Ward have assumed the title and toil of Associate Poetry Editors. Their contributions will be immediately evident to everyone reading this issue and the issues to come. The Board has also grown, adding Anett Jessop, a Modernist scholar based at the University of Texas at Tyler, and one of our two North American Vice Presidents. It is our pleasure to introduce them and welcome them to *The Robert Graves Review*.

The Robert Graves Review 1.1, unfolds in four sections, *Critical Studies*, *Bibliography*, *Notes*, and *Poems*. *Critical Studies* begins with Gregory Leadbetter's 'The "Reserve of Superstition": Graves, Coleridge, and the Poetry of Mystery', which presents a new coinage, reviving an old coinage from by S. T. Coleridge riffing on a phrase from Sir Walter Scott. The 'reserve of superstition' is a 'supra-cognitive sensitivity', a kind of modality of conscious or mental state Leadbetter describes as essential to both spirituality and poetic creativity, one that allies Coleridge and Graves in the 'revision of spirituality'. In his ontological argument, Leadbetter evokes 'superstition' as an active principle operating in the composition of poetry and tops off his discussion with his own poem 'A Poppet' to demonstrate the modality *in praxis*.

Nodding toward our obsessive and surely life-saving pandemic routine, Devindra Kohli looks at hands and handwashing in 'What Handwashing and Social Distancing in the Times of Corona Remind Us: The Left Hand is as Vital as the Right'. Weaving autobiography into an engaging tour of hand / washing routines in the work of various writers, including John Donne, W. B. Yeats, Thomas Hardy, Ernst Jandl, and Robert Graves, Kohli's deceptively breezy essay maintains an underlying seriousness and compassion. He tells us:

At the heart of the perceived or mythologized dialectic of the hands, then, lies a recognition of a quintessential duality within and without us. It propels our search for balancing or reconciling, however momentarily, through a creative interaction with the other within us and without – in the human world, in Nature, and the divine. (p. 23)

Deceptively breezy might also describe William Nicholson's children's book *The Pirate Twins*, which Marilynn S. Olson discusses in 'William Nicholson and The Pirate Twins'. As well as noting personal relationships, such as Robert Graves's association with the precursor dolls Nancy Nicholson fabricated during their marriage, and the significance of Jenny Nicholson and Eliza Banks to the book's creation, her beautifully illustrated essay documents its aesthetic and cultural dimensions, the significance of the book to the history of children's literature and to understanding Nicholson's artistic vision. In what may become her essay's most discussed passage, Olson reads the problematic Blackness of the twin pirates, and its ramifications.

Focus shifts from dolls to trolls in Paul O'Prey's bio-critical analysis of 'The Troll's Nosegay', a whimsical sonnet Graves composed in 1919 depicting a troll charged by 'a lady' to provide her a nosegay – a small bouquet. Graves light-heartedly transposes the paradigmatic comic lovers into a fairy-tale setting to create a gossamer sonnet, at a time when his very life hung by a thread.

My temperature rose to 105, and both lungs were affected.
The over-worked doctor said I had no chance, the household
wept openly, but one thing kept me alive: the obstinate
intention of getting my poem right. (p. 59)

O'Prey allows space for the reader to consider that soldiers are the most pragmatic of people. War makes one ruthlessly pragmatic. Good soldiering presupposes staying alive, and yet here is Graves, an experienced and by every account a very good soldier, fully convinced that composing a fairy tale sonnet would keep him

alive. Well, but it did. And this belief epitomises a mode of magical thinking that engenders a magical poem.

Joseph T. Thomas Jr.'s contribution broadens a critical review of ostensibly simple poems from this early period. He considers the aesthetic complexity of Graves's poems for children (declaring them 'neglected masterworks') by likening them to children's poems by Theodore Roethke, Graves's American contemporary. Thomas's (take a deep breath, o, clarinettist) 'Drawing Music from Penny Fiddles, or, a Biographical Account of Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke's Secret Lives as Children's Poets with a Look at their Neglected Masterworks, *The Penny Fiddle and I Am! Says the Lamb*, along with a Few Other Things' situates both poets in the Romantic tradition of Williams Blake and Yeats, and, provides rich analyses of comparable bearish traits, life and death concerns, and what Thomas calls 'joyous foolery':

Again, this is joyous foolery and nonsense. Like Graves and Roethke, however, I mean it seriously. Like Allie, I fashioned this essay as a call, as an occasion to summon Roethke and Graves from their rest, to place them on a nice beach in Mallorca and watch them 'play by the water's edge | Till the April sun set', to imagine what we might hear should we listen in on them as they (like the Boy and the bush) Talk and they Talk and they Talk. (pp. 75-76)

One might append to Thomas's melancholy-playful conclusion a paraphrase from Roethke: 'and they know they know they know'.

In a comparable comparative analysis, Eva Isherwood-Wallace brings together two first generation Modernists, Laura (Riding) Jackson and Mina Loy, to study their indebtedness to Gertrude Stein (whom Graves and Riding published in *Seizin Two* [1929]). The bridge from Thomas's Postmodernist readings to Isherwood-Wallace's Modernism – and perhaps from Graves's poetry of the late teens and twenties to that of the thirties – is nonsense, albeit nonsense of very different strains. In her incisive commentary on shared linguistic properties, Isherwood-Wallace notes the purpose

of Steinian nonsense (or, as she prefers ‘non-sense’) was to de-historicise language.

Riding and Loy both identified this sense of ‘pure’ language in Stein, regarding her often non-sensical poetry as resistant to traditional associations and grammatical form. Their own poetry responds to Stein’s approaches, grappling with this ‘new’ and ‘pure’ language as a tool against the legacy of historical influence. (p. 85)

By the way, Isherwood-Wallace is a grad student at Queens University Belfast, and we are glad to publish the first fruits of what we trust will be a long, productive literary career.

Since Isherwood-Wallace’s analysis spins around critical as well poetic expression, it seems apt to follow the thread with Alicja Bemben’s meta-critical review of the early critical responses (1956-1999) to Graves’s *I Claudius*, and *Claudius the God*. In her essay, Bemben demonstrates that early criticism of the *Claudius* books collected into three pockets of interest, or, to use her metaphor, contributed to three ‘pillars’: Graves’s synthetic predilections (merging opposites, e.g., past and present, fiction and history); the structure of his works; and interpretations of the central character, Claudius. Despite the homologous tendencies she illuminates, Bemben praises the criticism she surveys for persistently formulating new perspectives.

My essay on Graves’s ‘The Face in the Mirror’ follows, capping the *Critical Studies* section of the journal. In ‘A Different Look for “The Face in the Mirror”’, I propose that far from brutally leveraging the demands of the flesh as incentive for writing poems, Graves plays off the poem’s focus on materiality to interrogate the validity of his lifelong claim of being a poet. I also try to show that this poem’s preoccupation with the body (distanced, as is ‘the face’) parallels the poet’s preoccupation with the terror of history, personal or otherwise, which it attempts to resolve by reimagining the body as (borrowing from Blake criticism) a ‘body of the imagination’. I end by asking readers to consider that ‘The Face in the Mirror’

apostrophises the ‘body of imagination’ in its very form by assuming the contours of the female organ of generation.

Bibliography contains two pieces, chiefly by Carl Hahn, the journal’s Bibliography Editor. First, ‘The Plague of Modern Scholarship (Theses and Dissertations on the Subject of Robert Graves)’ is a comprehensive list of recorded scholastic works produced between 1933 and 2021, along with the reference sources in which these are catalogued. This unique bibliographic resource will serve Graves scholarship for years to come, but there are also intriguing patterns in the data worthy of pondering in their own right. For instance, we see the geographical breadth of Graves scholastic study: thirty-two countries are represented, and sixty-eight American colleges and universities located in thirty-eight states. As well as the familiar pairings with Sassoon, Blunden, Owen, and Hughes, we find Graves rubbing unlikely elbows with Edith Sitwell, H. Read, Thomas Pynchon, John Oxenham, Samuel Barber.... Society members will be pleased, though hardly surprised, to discover the number of scholastic works on Graves is on the up tick: the period between 1990-1999 produced twenty works; that between 2000-2009 produced thirty-five; and between 2010-2021, fifty-three. The accelerating pace of ‘the plague’ means that by the time you are reading these words, the list will be incomplete: but thus, a foundation for future instalments.

Hahn’s other contribution shares an unrecorded poem published in 1926, along with the picture by Stanley North it was written to accompany. As well as reprinting the lost (untitled) poem, in ‘The Ur-Text to “The Country Dance”’, Hahn and I point out telling similarities between it and the poem it was revised into and thematic links with ‘The White Goddess’.

Balancing the deep verticality of Hahn’s dive into dissertations, William Graves MBE begins the *Notes* section with an expansive bird’s-eye view of what might be called the functioning Graves universe. In tracing his ‘efforts over more than thirty-five years to preserve and make accessible for research and general knowledge the writings of [his] father’, William illuminates the achievements of The Robert Graves Copyright Trust, St John’s College Robert

Graves Trust, The *Fundació Robert Graves*, and other initiatives that directly or indirectly inform the studies of every writer present in our journal and many of its readers, too. William also rehearses a thumbnail history of the journal, and thus here seems an opportune moment to acknowledge that *The Robert Graves Review* owes William Graves a profound debt of gratitude for supporting the website on which you may be reading this sentence offering him our humble thanks for his vision, resolve, and awe-inspiring energy (and did I mention his son, Philip?).

Oliver D. Smith concludes *Notes* by marking Graves's writings during the nineteen fifties and sixties on the legend of Atlantis, which challenged the conventional wisdom by asserting a factual basis for Plato's account. According to Graves, the legend had historical underpinnings in the flood that washed over the island of Tritonis, and observations of a sunken harbour at Pharos dating back to the Egyptian New Kingdom. One of the several sources of Smith's investigation, 'The Lost Atlantis' appears in *The Crane Bag* (1969), which, by chance, also contains 'The Uses of Superstition', the essay Gregory Leadbetter builds on in this volume's lead-off spot.

The Crane Bag, with its freight of essays on mystery, magic, song and poetry, appeared the same year Donovan's song *Atlantis* hit the charts (even reaching no. 1 in Switzerland). We say this to point out that, even at seventy-five, having lived most of the previous forty years in Deyá, Graves was somehow still in touch with the counterculture of his day.

To launch *The Review* in style, we thought we should respond to Ian Firla's wish, expressed in his introduction to the 1998 issue of *Gravesiana*, that the journal include more 'creative writing', and that his own generous selection of poetry wouldn't be a 'one-off'. In our no less generous selection, we have included poets who participated in our recent conferences (as did Firla), along with one or two poets we hope you will agree we should know better. Joining company with Gregory Leadbetter's exemplary poem, introduced in essay number one, are poems by (in order of appearance) Michael Longley, Ruth Fainlight, Grevel Lindop, Paul O'Prey, and Linda Morales Caballeros. In ways consonant

with William Graves's magisterial view, we think these poems illuminate the cutting edge of Graves's poetic universe.

At a moment of weakness, prompted by the references to *The Crane Bag*, and the rich gallimaufry of scholarly interests, approaches, styles, and modes of expression, analytical, bibliographic and creative, we have here, we fleetingly considered naming this issue 'The Crane Bag', which would have had the additional virtue of extending the medley of themed editions that concluded *Gravesiana*. However, enticing though that prospect was, we decided in the end *The Robert Graves Review* lost nothing by having no modifying rubric, by appearing just as *The Robert Graves Review* volume 1, issue 1.

CRITICAL STUDIES

The ‘Reserve of Superstition’: Graves, Coleridge, and the Poetry of Mystery

Gregory Leadbetter

Abstract: This essay proposes a relationship between Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s thinking on superstition and the views that Graves presents in ‘The Uses of Superstition’. In particular, it describes the ways in which, for both poets, superstition embodies intuitive orders of perception that might amplify, rather than inhibit, processes of reasoning, knowing, and apprehending; and how the use of this faculty corresponds to the use of mystery in the practice of poetry.

Key words: Coleridge, S. T., superstition, poetry, mystery, consciousness, knowledge

Robert Graves’s essay ‘The Uses of Superstition’ began as a talk he gave at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1963, where, he told his audience, he would welcome any evidence that superstition ‘has not been successfully banished even from the Laboratories’.¹ The essay’s purpose, as its title suggests, is at odds with the longstanding historical tendency, first in a religious context, and latterly in a scientific one, to dismiss ‘superstition’ outright, as untrue, ignorant, and irrational: not only worthless, but damaging. Johnson’s definition for the *Dictionary* of 1755 summarises the learned attitude of his time:

1. Unnecessary fear or scruples in religion; observance of unnecessary and uncommanded rites or practices; religion without morality.
2. False religion; reverence of beings not proper objects of reverence; false worship.
3. Over-nicety; exactness too scrupulous.²

The idea of ‘uncommanded rites and practices’ is perhaps the most suggestive of these terms to a modern ear, in that it leaves the door ajar to something self-determined and spontaneous; something that might slip the net of prevailing orthodoxies to assume its own heretical life. It also comes closest to Graves’s own definition of ‘superstition’ as ‘those ancient rites, taboos, or impulses that have survived a change of religious doctrine’ (*Crane Bag*, p. 203).

On the face of it, that definition ties Graves’s thinking on superstition to the ‘survival’ theory regarding the persistence (for example) of pre-Christian beliefs and practices in Christian Europe. This idea – that observable, contemporary customs, proverbs, rites, and practices are relics of ancient pagan religion – emerged in its modern form in the seventeenth century: the antiquarian John Aubrey, for example, justified recording the ‘vulgar proverbs’ of rural people because they embody ‘the ancient natural philosophy of the vulgar’.³ This in itself, as Aubrey well knew, was an ancient notion: he quoted Pliny the Elder as an authority on the point.⁴ By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, the idea of pagan survivals was widely established among folklorists, anthropologists, and archaeologists.⁵ On this view – promulgated for many years, in particular, by scholars of the Folklore Society (founded in 1878) – folk customs were read as ‘cultural fossils’ of authentic pagan practices (Hutton, p. 113). The ramifications were far-reaching: dovetailing with revolutionary developments in the natural sciences, arts, and letters alike, these entailed a root-and-branch revision of the religious history of Europe, rapidly applied by comparative anthropology to humankind as a whole. James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* may have been reticent in spelling out its radical implications – ‘carefully and methodically sailing all round his dangerous subject’, as Graves puts it – but its message got through, to enormously influential effect: in Graves’s summary, ‘What he was saying-not-saying was that Christian legend, dogma and ritual are the refinement of a great body of primitive and even barbarous beliefs, and that almost the only original element in Christianity is the personality of Jesus’.⁶

Graves came to intellectual maturity immersed in this atmosphere, and of course his own work – not least *The White Goddess* – participates in its radical dynamic. ‘The Uses of Superstition’ follows the pattern of the early twentieth-century folklorist in relating the now much-waned fear of seeing the moon through glass, for example, to stories of the dying hero ‘taken by the Moon-goddess to her glass castle at the back of the North Wind’ (*Crane Bag*, p. 206). Likewise, to bring mayflower into the house is to curse the marriage bed, he says, ‘because the old matriarchal goddess Maia, or Cardea, to whom the may-tree was sacred, hated patriarchal marriage and demanded propitiation at Roman weddings: she would otherwise produce miscarriages or deaths in childbirth’ (p. 206). By the time Graves publishes ‘The Uses of Superstition’ in 1969, the idea that contemporary superstitions were direct survivals of ancient pagan belief and practice was increasingly questioned by younger scholars: the easy correlation Graves assumes in the examples given above would already have looked a little quaint (Hutton, pp. 112-13). The essay shows, however, that Graves was alive to something more in superstition than the theory of pagan survivals – whatever its virtues and limitations – could comprise: something with its own far-reaching implications, both for psychology and for poetry, and in particular the role that poetry might now play in a post-religious culture that has yet to develop a post-religious vocabulary. It is to this – and its foreshadowing in Coleridge – that I now turn.

Graves is alert to what could be called the phenomenology of superstition: the way *new* superstitions emerge within, from, and adapted to *new* historical circumstances. ‘British hospitals are hot-beds of superstition’, he writes, and gives examples of historically recent superstitions he traces to the Crimean War, the Boer War, the First World War, and a Victorian novel (*Crane Bag*, pp. 207, 206, 204). Graves also acknowledges the cultural and temporal contingency of superstition: ‘Peacock feathers are bad luck in an English home; but lucky in India’ (p. 203).⁷ He explains that although not a Christian, having turned from his Protestant upbringing in his teens, ‘I should find it both needless and

uncomfortable to abjure many superstitions which are part of my cultural heritage, chief of which is the idolatrous respect paid to a Bible' (p. 205). He describes a long list of superstitions observed, he claims, by his family on the Anglo-Irish side, and indeed a superstition unique to his family: 'it has always been unlucky in my family to see a parson mounted on a white horse' (pp. 205-207). There are family superstitions – just as there are family words. The inference that I'm interested in here is that, for Graves – despite his evident commitment to the idea of pagan survivals – the *fact* of superstition, as a human phenomenon, is more important than its provenance.

This in turn suggests that superstition is somehow implicated in human consciousness. It is not so much a fixed belief, but a pattern, or matrix, at work in the spontaneous, self-ordering activity of the psyche: the manifestation of a faculty, which – like the imagination – may either be cultivated or left to atrophy. Graves makes two interrelated psychological points that treat superstition in this way, and speak in its favour. 'I find myself far more at home with mildly superstitious people', he says, 'than with stark rationalists. They have more humanity' (p. 212). This is not merely a decorative matter; in that question of 'humanity' an entire world-view is at stake, with enormous practical consequences for us and our habitat:

Ancient superstitions in Britain are dying out under industrialism. I regret this trend. The man who stops in a crowded street and bows to the moon is not one who would wilfully destroy an Elizabethan house and replace it with a petrol station, or who would behave unchivalrously to women. Most superstitions do no harm, and are to urban life what grace notes are to a folk-song: they give it character. I would go further, and say that strongly held superstitions are necessary counter-weights to the unfettered intellect. (p. 209)

The point about 'character' is that it comprises an affective reality not reducible merely to rational terms: it communicates in ways that – like physiological gestures, birdsong, or colour – are

recognised, intuited, experienced, before they are reasoned out. This foregrounds Graves's contention that superstition acts as a *necessary* counterweight to the unfettered intellect – and in this further point, Graves echoes the thinking of one of his favourite poets: Coleridge.⁸

In Walter Scott's *Waverley*, the character Edward is surprised (and somewhat disappointed) to observe in Fergus – ‘notwithstanding his knowledge and education’ – a ‘reserve of superstition’, that probably lingered, we are told, because he did ‘not think deeply or accurately on such subjects’.⁹ This prompted Coleridge to respond in the margins of his own copy as follows:

In the most reflecting minds there may, nay must, exist a certain ‘*reserve* of Superstition[’], from the consciousness of the vast disproportion of our knowledge to the terra incognita yet to be known—Between these is a region of indistinctness, sights not forms, but to which we give a form/ Some few are aware, that the *form* is their own gift, yet without denying a SOMEWHAT seen/ whenever the last understood *causes* may be, still aliquid *superstat*—and [this] it is, which constitutes the reason of *Superstition*, and makes it reasonable.¹⁰

This note was written in the late 1820s, but Coleridge had always been interested in superstition. At times he used the term in a conventionally pejorative sense, pillorying both ecclesiastical obscurantism complicit in an oppressive political order, and the superstition of those who congratulated themselves on being free of it. Elsewhere, however, from his early work onwards, he conceived of ways in which ‘Superstition with unconscious hand’ might ‘Seat Reason on her throne’.¹¹ In 1804, he sketched notes for a work on superstition ‘taken in its philos. and most comprehen. sense’, to ‘trace out & detect its subtle Incarnations & Epiphanies’.¹² Despite the dead ends into which superstitious practice could so obviously lead, in the faculty manifest *in* superstition Coleridge also saw a medium of psychic awakening: a quickening of our powers of apprehension, an opening of the ‘inward eye’ that

discerns ‘invisible realities or spiritual objects’.¹³ The older Coleridge was fond of playing on the etymology of ‘superstition’, as in his marginal note, where the ‘reserve of superstition’ intuits that ‘aliquid *superstat*’ – ‘something stands above’. ‘Superstition’, for Coleridge (as his editors observe), implicitly beholds ‘things standing above yet nevertheless present to the senses’ (*Marginalia*, IV, 579 n). This intuition of a ‘terra incognita’, an unknown ground, *within* our knowledge becomes an animating energy by virtue of its very mystery. Note the defiance of theological or philosophical closure implied in the active role that this ascribes to the unknown – the ‘hidden mystery in every, the minutest, form of existence’.¹⁴ In May 1810, Coleridge wrote in his notebook:

The great difficulty of attacking all Superstition is this—that the superstitious ground their faith in certain aweful & profound Truths imperfectly caught hold of—glimpsed—the full understanding of which is the most arduous effect of the most expanded & potent Intellect. (*Notebooks*, III, entry 3808)

Superstition points to something fundamental in the making of the human mind and its relation to its habitat – not least because of the inarticulacy that it embodies: ‘the axioms of the Unthinking are to the philosopher the deepest problems as being the nearest to the mysterious Root and partaking at once of its darkness and its pregnancy’ (*Lay Sermons*, p. 50). For Coleridge, that teeming darkness is the common source of superstition *and* the quickening apprehension of hidden orders of being.

The ‘reserve of superstition’ – both for Graves and Coleridge – entails cognition beyond what we consciously *recognise* as cognition. As Graves puts it:

only a limited amount of factors can be immediately apparent even to an astute and well-informed man; what he calls ‘hunches’ are provided by an inner voice that works from a deeper level of perception—from an awareness of tiny

straws in the wind which, though real enough, cannot be logically framed. (*Crane Bag*, pp. 213-14)

Graves describes a way of perceiving, and thinking, without knowing: that is, with certitude, but without absolute certainty. It is no coincidence, I contend, that although Graves does not say as much, this corresponds to the process of poetic composition, which involves attending to a great deal more than deliberate calculation. There is an analogy here to Keats's famous aside on the quality of '*Negative Capability*', that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.¹⁵

Graves's remark (and the point I am making) also modulates Keats's observation, however: the 'fact & reason' that the poet or querent implicitly seeks are implicit in and ultimately *found* by the activity of intuitive (un)knowing – that is, the act of perception that accommodates more than what is already recognised as 'fact'. Graves goes on to say that the 'inner voice' of supra-cognitive perception confirms itself by directing the mind to a 'recognizable sign' in which it might invest the insight it has already achieved – and hence by which it might speak – however arbitrary the form of that sign (*Crane Bag*, p. 214).

The resonance here with Coleridge's description of the action of superstition in his marginal note is telling – as is Coleridge's own oblique reference to poetic composition in that same note. In defending the 'reserve of superstition', Coleridge refers to the reality and import of the 'form' we give to 'sights' that would otherwise lack form: a 'sight' without 'form' is *given* a form – creating, in effect, a medium between the known and the unknown, which partakes of both. Here his language recalls Shakespeare's famous lines on the poetic imagination:

As imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Coleridge's language, that is to say, implicates the faculty at work in superstition in both the work of the imagination and the work of the poet. Elsewhere, Coleridge writes of the 'Strange Self-power in the Imagination' when 'sensations have made it their Interpreter' – when 'even to the Anguish or the triumph of the *quasi-credent Soul*', its 'effect shall have *place & Substance & living energy*', and 'shine, like a firstling of creation' (*Notebooks*, III, entry 3547). Poetry itself, for Coleridge, is likewise akin to the latent power it evokes: riffing on August Schlegel in notes for a lecture of 1812, he extols 'the imperishable yet ever wandering Spirit of Poetry', in 'its various metempsychooses, & consequent metamorphoses' [...] 'at each new birth, at each rare avatar, for the human Race winning itself a new body by assimilating to itself the different materials [of] nourishment out of the then circumstances, & new organs of power & action appropriate to the new sphere of its motion & activity'.¹⁶ The 'Spirit of Poetry like all other living Powers', he adds in further notes, 'must embody in order to reveal itself' (*Lectures, 1808-1819*, I, p. 494).

The embodiment of superstition, for Coleridge, similarly reveals something vitally human: an intuitive response to mystery – indeed, the mysterious ground of being – a reality present to the senses that cannot be wholly comprised in sensuous form. As Graves emphasises, this acknowledges the activity and authority of something more than intellect, and in the ongoing manifestation of superstition, in new forms and circumstances, a supra-cognitive perception is at work in the spontaneous life of the psyche, which we can learn to use. For both poets, the 'reserve of superstition' keeps mystery alive as an operative reality in human thought, a mystery that we can think with, whose forms become mediatory agents of the known and the unknown. To put it one way: the unknown receives a body, and the known receives a ghost. The effect is at once unsettling, animating, and for all its hazard, potentially revelatory.

In their different but kindred ways, both Graves and Coleridge participated in, and are still helping to shape, that great revision of the history of spirituality to which I have referred: the awakening

of a new energy, dissatisfied with Christianity and often indeed with religion itself, in search of a language that is still yet to be found.¹⁷ For both men, however, poetry was fundamental to the renewal at hand – not least because their ideal of poetry is adapted to, and *creates with*, a supra-cognitive sensitivity – embodying, as Coleridge said of Shakespeare, ‘a genial Understanding directing self-consciously a power and a[n] implicit wisdom deeper than Consciousness’ (*Lectures 1808–1819*, I, p. 495). A poem can use the ‘reserve of superstition’, in the sense I have described, to irradiate the known with the unknown, and give the unknown form and presence: to rouse and activate the darker sphere of our knowing, and with it, quicken our powers of attention and apprehension, in the fullest sense of that word.

Thomas Warton, in his *History of English Poetry*, described the Elizabethan era as ‘the most POETICAL age of these annals’, for having produced ‘a sort of civilized superstition’:

The reformation had not yet destroyed every delusion, nor disenchanted all the strong holds of superstition. A few dim characters were yet legible in the mouldering creed of tradition. Every goblin of ignorance did not vanish at the first glimmerings of the morning of science. Reason suffered a few demons still to linger, which she chose to retain in her service under the guidance of poetry.¹⁸

The demons linger still. In that spirit, I include here a poem of my own, from my recent collection *Maskwork* (Nine Arches Press, 2020), first published in *The Hudson Review* in Spring 2020 (73.1), available online.¹⁹ A poppet is a doll – or an effigy used in witchcraft.

A Poppet

When I dug you up
like a potato,
you could have been

vegetable, grown
in earth too long

lost by a girl
who gave you her name
and worried her parents
to death with her love
for your unstitched eyes

whose loose threads
look into mine
as I bathe you until
the water is black
and your human hair

is chestnut again,
and the hemp sac
of your skin is warm
from the fire I
nearly put you in.

The embers are cold
when I think I wake
to find you folded
into my bed
and your voice thrown

to the tilth of my garden
growing you bone
by bone with words
no human breath
could hold, biting
my tongue and drawing
blood that tastes
wrong as I follow,
now a father
to a lost child

and feel small hands
push me into
fresh-torn ground.
When I think I wake,
your small hands lift me out.

Gregory Leadbetter is a poet and critic. His latest collection of poems is *Maskwork* (2020). He is also the author of *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (2011).

NOTES

¹ Robert Graves, *The Crane Bag, and Other Disputed Subjects* (London: Cassell, 1969), p. 203. This paper expands upon the talk I gave at the Robert Graves 125 online celebration, 17 October 2020, and I am grateful to Michael Joseph for the invitation to publish it here.

² Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755, 1773), ed. by Beth Rapp and others (2021). <<https://johnsonsdictionaryonline.com>> [Accessed 9 July 2021]. I have excluded Johnson's examples of usage, for which he quotes Milton, Dryden, and the King James version of the Bible (Acts 25:19).

³ John Aubrey, *Natural History of Wiltshire* (1685), ed. by John Britton (Wiltshire: Wiltshire Topographical Society, 1847), p. 6.

⁴ Aubrey quotes the first part of the following sentence from Pliny's *Natural History*, 18.6.25: 'Ac primum omnium oraculis maiore e parte agemus, quae non in alio vitae genere plura certiorave sunt: cur enim non videantur oracula a certissimo die maximeque veredico usu profecta?' 'And first of all we will proceed for the most part by the guidance of oracular precepts, which in no other department of life [Pliny is writing about cereal agriculture] are more numerous or more trustworthy – for why not assign oracular value to precepts originating from the infallible test of time and the supremely truthful verdict of experience?' Pliny, *Natural History*, x vols. v, books 17-19, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library, 371 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 204-05.

⁵ For a useful summary of this development and the scholarship that has addressed it, see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of*

Modern Pagan Witchcraft (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 112-31.

⁶ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber, 1961), p. 242.

⁷ I wonder how widely observed this still is in England.

⁸ On Coleridge and superstition more generally, see my *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 30-32 *et passim*.

⁹ Walter Scott, *Waverley* (1814), ed. by Andrew Hook (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 191. For a discussion of Coleridge's note in relation to *Waverley*, see Jonathan V. Farina, 'Superstitious Marginalia: Coleridge and *Waverley*', *The Wordswoth Circle* 36.1 (Winter 2005), 29-32.

¹⁰ S. T. Coleridge, *Marginalia*, 6 vols. I-II ed. by George Whalley, III-VI ed. by H. J. Jackson and George Whalley (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press and Routledge, 1980-2001), IV, p. 579.

¹¹ S. T. Coleridge, 'The Destiny of Nations', in *Poems*, ed. by John Beer (London: Everyman, 1990), p. 99.

¹² S. T. Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 5 vols., ed. by Kathleen Coburn and others (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press and Routledge, 1957-2002), II, entry 2060.

¹³ S. T. Coleridge, *The Friend*, 2 vols, ed. by Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press and Routledge, 1969), I, p. 156.

¹⁴ S. T. Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. by R. J. White (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press and Routledge, 1972), p. 49.

¹⁵ John Keats, *Letters of John Keats*, ed. by Robert Gittings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 43.

¹⁶ S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, 2 vols, ed. by R. A. Foakes (Princeton and London: Princeton University Press and Routledge, 1987), I, pp. 465-66.

¹⁷ For Graves, the White Goddess emerged to fill the void. Coleridge's case is more complicated. While he was an avowed Christian, and sought to revivify spirituality and the idea of religion in Christian terms, his philosophical language – like his poetics – implicitly adapts to a post-religious form: that is, a form (strictly speaking) neither 'religious', nor reducible to a 'secular' idiom. In this respect, his search for the fundamental grounds of religion – and principles capable of withstanding the dehumanising forces of psychic atrophy – assumed another (secret) life, the story of which is yet fully to be told (though I

am working on this). For a primer, however, see my *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination*.

¹⁸ Thomas Warton, *The History of English Poetry*, 3 vols (London, 1774-1781), III, pp. 490, 49, 496.

¹⁹ Gregory Leadbetter, ‘A Poppet’, *The Hudson Review*, 73.1(Spring 2020) <<https://hudsonreview.com/2020/04/doe-a-puppet-two-lost-things-consistori-del-gai-saber/#.YPg6ZuhKibg>> [Accessed 21 July 2021]

What Handwashing and Social Distancing in the Times of Corona Remind Us: The Left Hand is as Vital as the Right

Devindra Kohli

Abstract: In a personal memoir, the author reflects on how poets such as John Donne, W. B. Yeats, Robert Graves, and Ernst Jandl portray conjoined hands as a mode of harmony and creativity. This reconciles traditional and religious values / sanctity associated with the right hand. He reflects on his own journey through this motif from his childhood through to the present Corona pandemic situation.

Keywords: hands, handwashing, Anjali Mudra, Coronavirus (COVID-19), Robert Graves, W. B. Yeats, Thomas Hardy, Ernst Jandl, John Donne, Cheiro

Luckily, I didn't have to break a bone in the right forearm in order to learn that the left hand is as good as the right hand. However, like most of us, I was raised to believe that the sanction (religious / mythological) vested in the right hand is superior to and more auspicious than the left hand. While growing up in Mardan (NWFP, now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan), I was taken at age five for my naming ceremony to Panja Sahib, a Sikh temple, where the founder Guru Nanak's right hand (panja / extended palm) is imprinted on a boulder above a spring of water. Subsequently, in Delhi, where my 'displaced' parents settled in 1948 after the Partition of India, we learnt to offer salutations with both our hands pressed together, whether they were to gods and goddesses in the temple or to visiting guests at home. Now so many years since I first practiced such greeting, it seems ironical that the Corona virus, irrespective of class, religion, and caste, should have

made this mode of greeting so much safer than any other one. Yet, as I was growing up, there seemed to be much mystery attached to the right hand: it was, almost insistently, the preferred primary performer in rituals and in writing.

Later, as an undergraduate, while searching in Delhi Public Library for more books by Thomas Hardy whose fascinating novel *Far from the Madding Crowd* was a prescribed text, I ‘chanced’ upon *You and Your Hand* (1932) by Cheiro (meaning hands in Greek), the pen name of William John Warner, an Irishman and a contemporary of Hardy, who had learned astrology, numerology and palmistry in India before setting himself up as a dazzling celebrity consultant in London and later in Hollywood. Cheiro claimed that *You and Your Hand* (his last book) was further evidence of ‘the first principle that the left is the hand you are born with – the right is the hand you make’, but equally it was ‘one more of the many books of nature where God writes its history on leaves, on stones and on everything’.¹

To my Hardy-eyed imagination as an undergraduate, Cheiro seemed to have emerged from Hardy’s extended fictional world of ‘circumstance’ and predestination like a presiding predictor about whom even the doubting Mark Twain had been moved to acknowledge that ‘Cheiro has exposed my character to me with humiliating accuracy. I ought not to confess this accuracy, still I am moved to do it’.² Twain had, in fact, used, as I discovered later, fingerprint identification in his novel *Puddin’head Wilson* whereas Oscar Wilde’s ‘Lord Arthur Savile’s Crime’ (1887) was based on his actual hand-reading meeting with Cheiro. More recent research by Anne Mallory and J. Hillis Miller, for example, points out that not only are references to hands a constant feature in Hardy’s writing but also that Hardy underwent a chiromantic reading as shown by drawings and interpretations of his hands in Eveline M. Forbe’s article ‘Some Noteworthy Hands’.³ Further, in *The Dynasts*, a play in verse, Hardy used a palmist’s terminology for his topographical descriptions.

I had no knowledge of such references in Hardy when I first encountered Cheiro. All I understood was that in his novels and poems, Hardy astutely explored the often-blurred connection between ‘character’ and ‘fate’ of individuals and that, while various influences shape an individual’s character, there is also the overriding phenomenon of an indifferent Immanent Will that ‘heaves through Space, and moulds the times, | With mortals for its fingers!’⁴ The power invested in the right hand is heavily underlined in 166 references in the Bible. The same idea resonates in John Milton’s great epic *Paradise Lost*, as Satan argues, ‘Our puissance is our own, our own right hand | Shall teach us highest deeds’.

So, while I read English and American authors for my courses, I also read more books by Cheiro and in fact began to dabble in comparing the lines not only of one hand with the other but also with those of my friends. I looked at them as though they were lines from different poems, thus exploring this genre of what seemed to be scientific detection, if not science fiction! Some of my friends who were familiar with traditional Hindu palmistry told me that the interpretations of the lines vary according to the gender: while a man’s right hand is thought to reflect his own destiny and character, his left expresses those of his spouse. In some rituals the woman’s left hand is regarded as the counterpart of the man’s right hand.⁵ Cheiro argued rather anecdotally that whereas Henry VIII had banned palmists and astrologers by an Act of Parliament since ‘this much-married monarch was afraid his wives might learn their fate’, his daughter, Elizabeth I, who became the Queen eleven years later and never married, ‘not only encouraged such tabooed studies but actually regularly consulted and trusted John Dee, her favourite palmist and astrologer’ (*You and Your Hand*, p. 22). At first, these gendered interpretations seemed romantically intriguing, but I found they were also confusing. So, I also gave up on Cheiro as it seemed that the obsession with changing or unchanging lines on our hands detracted from the immediate challenges of exploring life and living it more fully.

Whatever the difference in the lines of my two hands, the simple fact was that I needed to use both hands as and when needed, just

as I needed both my feet to balance my walk on the road, one at a time, and sometimes both together, for example, to jump over a puddle. I came across Rumi's saying, 'Life is a balance of holding on and letting go'. One needed both hands, even metaphorically, to do that balancing act! On one occasion, in 1963 after I joined teaching at the University of Delhi, I even put forward, with instinctive convenience, my left hand to receive an award at an annual function. I realized this when I received a copy of the officially taken photo. A colleague of mine then, who had recently returned with a degree from Columbia University, was not amused at seeing the photo, and was quick to point to the *faux paus*, saying: 'Do we receive an award with our left hand'?

The English and American poets I studied, and later taught, placed no special emphasis on the right hand. Although John Donne rhetorically addresses his patroness, the Countess of Bedford – 'Reason is our soul's left hand, faith her right, | By these we reach divinity, that's you'; he quickly adds that even though it is 'a squint left-handedness... yet we cannot want that hand'.⁶ Donne remains a preeminent poet who with 'roving hands'⁷ explores to achieve spiritual wholeness: 'to intergraft our hands, as yet | Was all the means to make us one'.⁸ Or, when he ventriloquizes Sappho in a verse letter to her female friend Philaenis, '[...] thy right hand, and cheek, and eye, only | Are like thy other hand, and cheek, and eye'.⁹

W. B. Yeats, who was profoundly influenced by the occult, astrology, theosophy and mysticism does not prioritize the right hand over the left as Milton does. In 'The Balloon of the Mind', Yeats apostrophizes both his hands to focus on pulling in the ideas into the shape – 'narrow shed' – of his poem:

Hands, do what you're bid:
Bring the balloon of the mind
That bellies and drags in the wind
Into its narrow shed.

And in 'A Poet to His Beloved':

I bring you with reverent hands
[...] And with heart more old than the horn
That is brimmed from the pale fire of time:
White woman with numberless dreams,
I bring you my passionate rhyme.

Equally in ‘Sailing to Byzantium’, as ‘an aged man’, reflecting on the procreative ‘sensual music’ of ‘dying generations’, he invokes the soul to ‘clap its hands’ to rejoice in its power to create ‘monuments of unageing intellect’ and be gathered ‘into the artifice of eternity’.

It was not until I discovered Robert Graves that I was revisited by the mysterious tradition of prioritizing the right hand over the left. Graves famously attributed his poetry to the right hand and his prose to the left hand even though he claimed that he made more money from his bestselling autobiography and historical novels than he did from his poetry! Writing against the Biblical grain and the patriarchal tradition in *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth*, originally published in 1948, Graves reimagined poetic inspiration and reconstructed it from various sources as a matriarchal gift. Poetic inspiration is mythologized as the mystique of the hands in engagement with the Muse. In ‘Hercules at Nemea’, for example, Graves reinterprets the mythical story of Hercules killing the lion at Nemea. Instead of Hercules killing the lion, it is the poet’s amorous engagement with the Muse who, ‘fierce as a lioness’, maims his ‘fool’s-finger’ as a token of poetic heroism:

See me a fulvous hero of nine-fingers –
Sufficient grasp for bow and arrow.
My beard bristles in exultation:
Let all Nemea look and understand
Why you have set your mark on this right hand.

In ‘Juan at the Winter Solstice’, the Muse / Moon-Goddess herself signals with her right hand when the moment for the poet’s amorous sacrifice has arrived:

She in her left hand bears a leafy quince;
When with her right she crooks a finger, smiling,
How may the King hold back?
Royally then he barters life for love.

Thus, in evoking the power of the Muse, Graves draws on collective consciousness, ranging from romance to ritual, mythology to religion in attributing propitious power to the right hand. If Graves’s belief seems a subversion of the dominant Western belief in a male divinity, he is, arguably, on home ground so far as Hinduism is concerned. In the diverse streams of Hindu mythology and religion, there is also the concept of the interdependence of the right and the left, the male and the female symbolized, for example, in *Ardhanarishvara*, the integration of two deities, Shiva and Parvati, as Shiva-Shakti. Whereas in the androcentric Hinduism, the three goddesses Saraswati, Lakshmi, and Kali are seen as deity consorts respectively of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, in the gynocentric Hinduism more prevalent in Northeastern parts of India, they are seen as triple goddesses representing Shaktidharma, with Mahasaraswati riding a swan or peacock, Mahalakshmi riding an owl or elephant, and Mahakali riding a lion or a bull.

According to Graves, the story of Hercules has a universal appeal because not only does the word Hercules have multiple meanings, but: ‘He is, in fact, a composite deity consisting of a great many oracular heroes of different nations at different stages of religious development; some of whom became real gods while some remained heroes’.¹⁰

Martin Seymour-Smith also noted the complex personality of the Muse:

The Goddess thesis in itself is simple, though its detail is complex. [...] The original Goddess is Mother, Lover and

Crone (Layer-out). [...] Graves's definition of his own function is quite different from that put forward by any other poet (or critic): it is 'religious invocation of the Muse, the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites'.¹¹

At the heart of the perceived or mythologized dialectic of the hands, then, lies a recognition of a quintessential duality within and without us. It propels our search for balancing or reconciling, however momentarily, through a creative interaction with the other within us and without – in the human world, in Nature, and the divine.

Is there a message hovering in the Corona-ized air / Coronavirus times? Can it be that while birds and animals breathe and rejoice as before, we humans, irrespective of caste, class, creed, and nation must needs wear a mask, keep physical distance and observe ritual washing of both hands? When social greeting with the right and left hands joined together ('Anjali Mudra' in Sanskrit) becomes a protective shield against the virus, the political undertones, if any, are tellingly conveyed by Ernst Jandl. In his tantalizingly short poem, 'lichtung', the Austrian poet, reflects on the natural symmetry and the potential or perceived asymmetry of the left and the right, punning on the letters 'r' and 'l' in 'lechts und rinks' instead of 'rechts und links':

Manche meinen
lechts und rinks

kann man nicht velwechsern.
Werch ein Illtum!

some say
reft and light
don't collerate.
entilery farse!¹²

In 'Sea Side', Robert Graves playfully critiques the mechanized symmetry of housing structures through which man destroys, as in

duplication through procreative but loveless coupling, the ‘symmetry of two in sea and sand, | In left foot, right foot, left hand and right hand’.

The beast with two backs is a single beast,
Yet by his love of singleness increased
To two and two and two and two again,
Until, instead of sandhills, see, a plain
Patterned in two and two, by two and two –
And the sea parts in horror at a view
Of rows of houses coupling, back to back,
While love smokes from their common chimney-stack
With two-four-eight-sixteenish single same
Re-registration of the duple name.

In this blurring of distinction between the right and the left hand, there is a poetic message perhaps that we should hold fast, with both hands, with compassion and empathy, as Graves, too, who attributed his poetry to his right hand, urges:

Hold fast, with both hands, to that royal love
Which alone, as we know certainly, restores
Fragmentation into true being.

Devindra Kohli is a scholar editor. Formerly Professor of English, University of Kashmir, Srinagar, he has taught in Delhi and in Germany and held numerous Visiting Fellowships in Europe and the US. He is a founding co-editor of *The Indian Literary Review* (now no longer extant), written two books and edited numerous books including *Kamala Das: Selected Poems* (Penguin).

NOTES

¹ Cheiro, *You and Your Hand* (London: Jarrolds, 1934), pp. 34, 24.

Digitized by Internet Archive for the internetarchivebooks, 2021.

<<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.200289/page/n5/mode/1up>> [Accessed 25 May 2021]

² Cheiro, *Cheiro's Memoirs: The Reminiscences of a Society Palmist* (London: William Rider, 192), p. 132. Digitized by Internet Archive for the internetarchivebooks, 2021 <<https://archive.org/details/cheirosmoirsre0000chei/page/132/mode/2up>> [Accessed 25 May 2021]

³ Eveline M. Forbes, 'Some Noteworthy Hands', *The New Review* 10.1 (June 1894), 691-704.

⁴ Thomas Hardy, *The Dynasts*, II.3 [n.p.] <<http://www.online-literature.com/hardy/the-dynasts/8/>> [Accessed 24 May 2021]

⁵ Kirti Trivedi, 'The Asymmetry of Symmetry: The Left and the Right in Hindu Philosophy, Art and Life' <<https://www.mi.sanu.ac.rs/vismath/proceedings/trivedi.htm>> [Accessed 24 May 2021]

⁶ John Donne, 'To the Countess of Bedford', *John Donne's Poetry*: selected and edited by A. L. Clements (New York: Norton, 1966), p. 66.

⁷ John Donne, 'Elegy XIX. To His Mistress Going to Bed', *John Donne's Poetry*, p. 55.

⁸ John Donne, 'The Ecstasy', *John Donne's Poetry*, p. 30.

⁹ John Donne, 'Sapho to Philaenis', in *The Poems of John Donne*, 2 vols, ed. E. K. Chambers. With an Introduction by George Saintsbury (New York: Bartley, 2012), II, pp. 23-24.

<<https://www.bartleby.com/357/152.html>> [Accessed 9 June 2021]

¹⁰ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber, 1961), p. 124.

¹¹ Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves: His Life and Work* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 392.

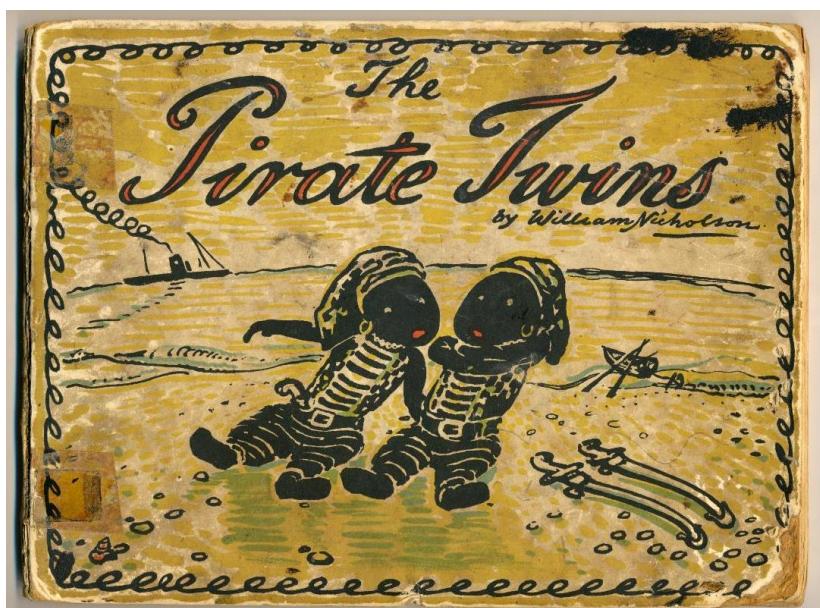
¹² David Sansone, '(di)versions, translations into Greek and English of Ernst Jandl's "lichtung"', 2008 <<https://www.academia.edu/4579896>> [Accessed 24 May 2021]

William Nicholson and the Pirate Twins

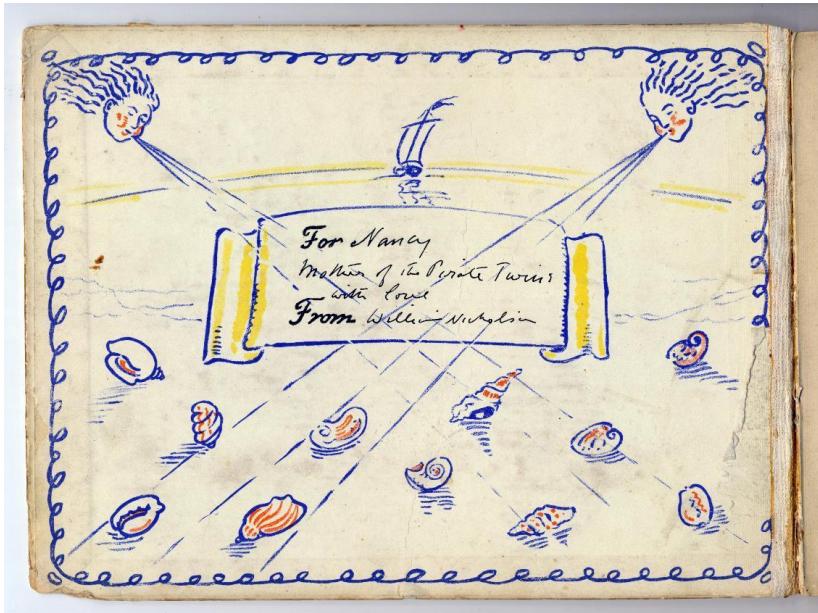
Marilynn S. Olson

Abstract: *The Pirate Twins*, black sock dolls designed and created and named by Nancy Nicholson, intersect the story of her life with Robert Graves as well as that with her father, Sir William Nicholson, who used them as models for the eponymous picturebook published within a month of *Good-Bye to All That*. The small, but triumphant, pirates echo Nicholson's treatment of a giant pirate in his costume designs for *Peter Pan* (1904); they are a characteristic, revelatory contribution to the artist's canon.

Keywords: black protagonists in children's literature, pirates in children's literature, modernist picturebooks



Cover of Nancy Nicholson's copy of *The Pirate Twins*. Permission Carola Stuart Wortley, in trust for Manuela Graves.



Dedication in the front of Nancy Nicholson's copy of *The Pirate Twins*.
Permission Carola Stuart Wortley, in trust for Manuela Graves.

Pirates

The Pirate Twins (1929) by the English painter Sir William Nicholson is a milestone in children's picturebooks.¹ *The Pirate Twins*, however, is also a family story, and the family details are interwoven with the literary and artistic. Nicholson was Robert Graves's friend and collaborator, as well as his father-in-law and grandfather of his first family of children.

As Sam Graves noted, WN bought some black patterned socks in France and 'had second thoughts about them'.² He gave them to his daughter Nancy, and Nancy made them into two pirate dolls, called Alexander and Bartholomew.³ They had little belts and stocking caps and scimitars and earrings. Thus, Nancy is 'the mother' – the creator – of the pirate twins, who became little companions and personages in the family. She eventually made

more. Each of the Graves / Nicholson children had a pair of them. Two of these remain, which may have belonged to Jenny Nicholson.⁴



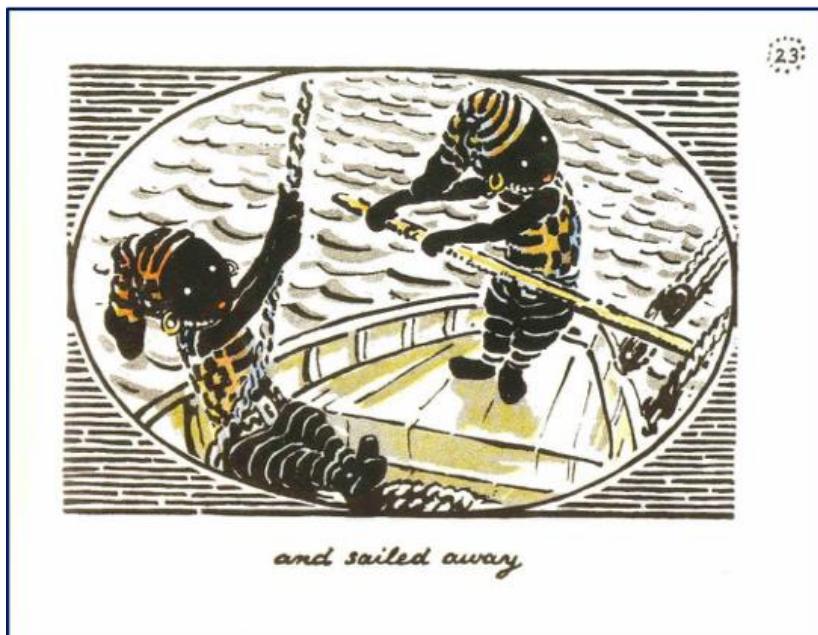
Photos by Nancy Nicholson of Alexander and Bartholomew, ‘Taken on Nancy’s roadside step in Ansty’. Permission Carola Stuart Wortley, in trust for Manuela Graves.

In a July 1919 letter to his sister Rosaleen, Robert Graves appears to be discussing the pirate dolls as a potential source of much-needed income in the second year of his marriage to Nancy, a time when plans for children's projects were being discussed. Richard Perceval Graves notes: 'Another scheme, mentioned in the same letter, involved marketing a black gollywog doll of Nancy's design. Examples of these dolls "went everywhere with them" at that time; and Robert asked Rosaleen to tell their father that he and Nancy were in the process of having their design patented'.⁵

The Pirate Twins are not golliwoggs; they do not have the minstrel faces or bushy hair characteristic of the Florence Upton creation.⁶ But they had presence; the costumes were clever; and they were an endearing size. As a designer, Nancy continued to consider producing them by a screen-printing process some decades later.⁷ They served as the models for the characters in her father's seminal picturebook.

The Pirate Twins is taken seriously by scholars because it is an early and unusually fine example of a book in which narrative line is carried by a deft integration of the visual and literary elements and, of course, is beautifully drawn. The book contributes to Nicholson's canon in meaningful ways because it is a legitimate extension of his artistic vision. He had chosen not to be solemn about the things that he was most serious about; the wit and playfulness of his pages was the hallmark of his defiance of the painting tradition he had inherited. He had put some of his most brilliant creative work into still lifes of food and fish, for example, which serve a narrative function in *The Pirate Twins* book. His oil paintings were fundamentally concerned with 'magic', often based upon painterly illusion or an unusual viewpoint. As his daughter Eliza noted, 'it was as if he were training to be a magician, and we were helping him'.⁸ The magic in this book is sustained by some of the same framing techniques he used for landscapes. When Maurice Sendak called *The Pirate Twins* 'The first – the best – the most gloriously original modern picture book of all time', he was recognizing technique, as well as narrative content.⁹ *The Pirate Twins*, however, is also important because William Nicholson was

not an easy man or artist to know, and his work frequently causes others to wish to know more about him. *The Pirate Twins*, written at the end of his interaction with the children who were essential for its creation, is also scrutinized for what it may reveal about its author.



The Twins escape back to sea. Andrew Jones Art, 2005. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

The Pirate Twins is an intimate book because it looks hand drawn, including the borders of the pictures and page numbers, and has no printed material in it. As Greg M. Smith notes, line drawings convey the knowledge that they are the subjective view of a single hand, and the simplicity and casual style of the book emphasize this.¹⁰ The very few words are written in thick cursive handwriting that is part of the page design. Nathalie op de Beeck has noted that the ‘hand drawn’ look is an illusory technique because, of course, the pages in Nicholson’s books were designed to be mass produced.¹¹ Picturebooks produced by photolithography were an innovation in this era that had created much more interest in the

United States than in England. The page appearance also contains a little joke because the lozenge-within-a-rectangle framing technique used on about a third of the twenty-eight pages resembles a style that Thomas Bewick, for example, used in his version of Aesop (it is a style associated with historic wood engraving. WN, a well-known wood engraver, borrowed it to use as much like a lens as like a frame) but in pen and ink, not engraving. The cursive writing puts the book into the hands of parents or older people to read aloud to a young child, making it a book for two-generation oral storytelling.



Dedication in Eliza Banks' copy from her father. She was called Penny (from Pennywort) as a child. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

The little girl in *The Pirate Twins*, Mary, is also in *Clever Bill* (1926), the first of WN's picturebooks. Eliza Banks, his younger daughter with his second wife, Edith Stuart Wortley, explained in her essay about *Clever Bill* that the model for Mary in that book was R. G. and Nancy's daughter Jenny (Eliza's slightly older

niece).¹² The sunny pictures reflect the happy days at Sutton Veny in the 1920s when Nicholson was surrounded by family children:

Jenny, David, Catherine and Sam were living with Nancy, two miles away in the next village. We quickly became a small, very active group of five, always playing together, running across the meadows visiting each other, bicycling, exploring our Wiltshire downs and woodlands.¹³

John and Anne, Eliza's half-brother and sister by her mother's first marriage, were older than this group but present: their playthings also became part of *Clever Bill*. Eliza and Jenny both wore the sunbonnets shown in the books when they went out, and Mary's dress was one that Nancy had made for Jenny.¹⁴ Carola Stuart Wortley, the daughter of WN's stepson, John, notes that Mary owes a great deal to Eliza, who interacted with him daily during these years.¹⁵

But the little girls, even if present, were no longer the right size to model for Mary in 1929, and perhaps earlier memories were also playing a part. Nancy, for example, posed in a similar bonnet for a childhood portrait;¹⁶ there had been seaside homes and holidays over many years. Nonetheless, some illustrations in the book may reflect Ciboure, France, where WN, Edie, Eliza, and Eliza's nurse spent February and March of 1929 (Reed, p. 481). *The Pirate Twins* was illustrated immediately after this sojourn during the April and May that saw the Graves / Nicholson marriage end along with RG's support of his children.¹⁷ The following fall saw Eliza off to boarding school, the publication of *The Pirate Twins* (September), and *Good-Bye to All That* (November): the end of more than one family and era.

The related family background – Eliza Banks' contention that *The Pirate Twins* is about her father's life – has been the most-discussed aspect of the story.¹⁸

Peter Pan and the Black Pirate



1904 drawing of the 'Black Pirate' costume sketch as used in the first production of *Peter Pan*. Permission Karpeles Manuscript Library.

Pirates reoccur in WN's career, but the most relevant black pirate may be one that was created when Nancy (1899-1977) was about five. WN designed the costumes for the first production of *Peter Pan* in 1904.¹⁹ James Barrie, the playwright, and WN both had the desire to see 'real' pirates rather than *Pirates of Penzance* pirates in the show, and the script to some extent reflected the diversity of

pirate culture. WN, who had included rough men among the woodcuts for his *London Types* (1898) and *An Alphabet* (1897) books and in his Morris Dancer paintings, designed very vigorous pirates.²⁰ The two pirates that were notably the most gorgeously attired, however, were Captain Hook and ‘the Black Pirate’ (‘the gigantic black behind him has had many names since he dropped the one with which dusky mothers still terrify their children on the banks of the Guadjo-mo’).²¹ Marguerite Steen’s biography is the source for the story that the Black Pirate, to whom WN had given a large club (some later performances and films call him ‘Giant Black Man’), caused a child to have hysterics on the first night and was, thereafter, dropped from the performance (pp. 95–99). Since Gerald Du Maurier put on a truly sinister debut of Captain Hook (‘there was no peace in those days until the monster was destroyed’),²² this particular detail (that it was the Black Pirate who caused the hysterics or that children’s hysterics would have been considered a cause for dropping a character) raises questions. It might be, one would think, that Barrie found that a minor character should not be taking attention from Hook. But Nicholson had taken special pains to make the Black Pirate dangerous and grand. This consideration can be added to the serious approach Nicholson took to Peter ‘the black prince’ Jackson, the prize fighter, in *The Almanac of Twelve Sports* a few years earlier. And to those notable pieces mentioned by Sanford Schwartz – the impressive portrait of Duffadur Valayar Shah (‘The Viceroy’s Orderly’ 1915) and the pastel featuring a black woman’s face for Steen’s novel *The Sun Is My Undoing* (1941) – to suggest an interest in or sympathy for people of colour on Nicholson’s part, which has enhanced the discussion of *The Pirate Twins*.²³

It may be that the Black Pirate, conceived of grandly, simply did not fit within the play. The two men differed widely in what they thought the play was about. Nicholson’s sketch of Peter, for example, looks like James Dean (a rebellious male adolescent), not the androgynous figure of the stage. The pirates also are differently conceived. Barrie’s pirates are meant to be a thrill, but they are also meant to be summarily vanquished as part of the self-

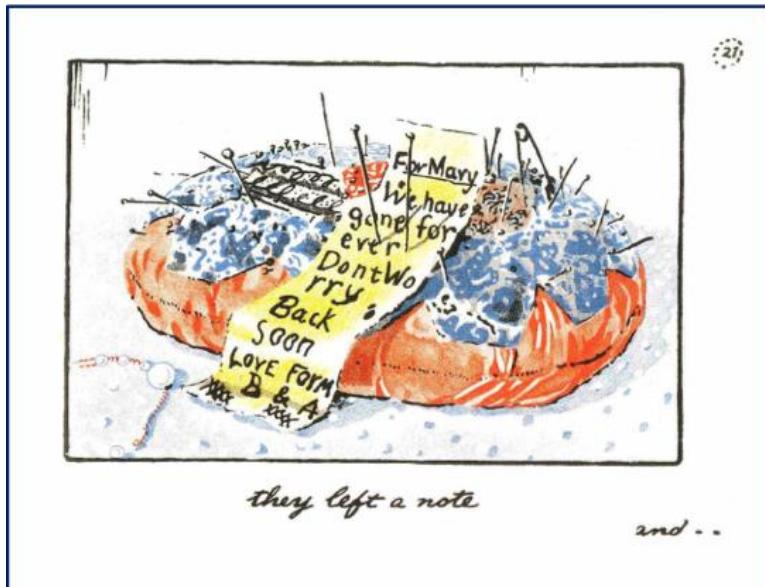
aggrandizing fantasy of the boys. *Coral Island*, *Treasure Island*, etc. are Barrie's sources, and this is Barrie's resolution (Alton, pp. 379-83). This inevitable resolution means that a pirate such as the Black Pirate, whose giant size is most of his identity within the script, will be undermined within this play. It is easy to see as comic a sword fight between a giant man and a child hardly reaching his waist that ends in the child winning.

But Nicholson's favourite author in boyhood and young manhood was Alexandre Dumas.²⁴ Dumas' *Georges* (1843; English trans. 1846), is a pirate story in which the pirates win. *Georges* is frequently cited as the only novel in which the partly African author, Dumas, discussed race and had a biracial hero. Georges, a man of education and refinement who faces social discrimination on a Caribbean island, leads a failed slave rebellion, is captured and condemned to death, and is saved at the last moment by his pirate brother and crew. They blow up the Royal Navy:

The flames of the *Leicester* grew thicker and thicker. Tongues of fire flickered out of her portholes; climbed her masts; devoured her sails.

The loaded guns burst, one by one. Then, all at once, there was a deafening explosion. The body of the ship split, and a geyser of flame shot skyward. The observers watched fragments of masts and riggings hurtle through the air and plunge into the sea. Of the *Leicester*, nothing remained but debris.²⁵

And Georges gets the girl. *Winning* pirates are what the Pirate Twins are, too, and they win in a plot very like that of *Peter Pan* – only, of course, the Twins are Peter.



The Pirate Twins' farewell note, using the initials of Alexander and Bartholomew. Andrew Jones Art, 2005. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

The Pirate Twins (and 'Trips')

Good-Bye to All That (1929) includes an anecdote from 1918 that quotes Robbie Ross as telling RG that he should not marry Nancy Nicholson because ‘there was negro blood in the Nicholson family, that it was possible that one of Nancy’s and my children might revert to coal-black’.²⁶ (Ross, who died in 1918, attended the Nicholson / Graves wedding.) If it was known when or whether RG told his prospective father-in-law and wife what Ross had said (before the publication of his autobiography eleven years later), ‘the mother of the Pirate Twins’ might be seen as a spirited response on Nancy’s part or a wry joke from father to daughter. The dolls were in existence by, at the latest, 1919. Whether or not RG initiated this discussion in the family, there are indications that WN thought about the topic of African descent during the 1920s, while Eliza (born 1920) was growing up. Part of the reason why Eliza

maintained that the pirate story reflected her father's life had to do with family references to this possibility. According to Eliza, the story of how there came to be an African ancestor in Nicholson's family, in WN's view, had something to do with a liaison with a seafarer (someone from a ship) wrecked on the Isle of Skye, where the ancestral Nicholsons lived. In her interview with Elaine Moss in 1996, it was mentioned as 'quite possibly an African sailor from a wrecked galleon in the Spanish Armada' (p. 103). Sanford Schwartz, whose interviews with Banks were in 2000, notes it was 'perhaps after a slave ship ran aground in a storm' on the Isle of Skye (pp. 243-46).²⁷ The sense that Eliza had that 'however straightforward his text and image I often feel an undertow of mystery, as if there is more to it than meets the eye'²⁸ is enhanced in *The Pirate Twins* by the more particular sense that one of the currents within the story has to do with self-revelation about feelings and identity on her father's part.

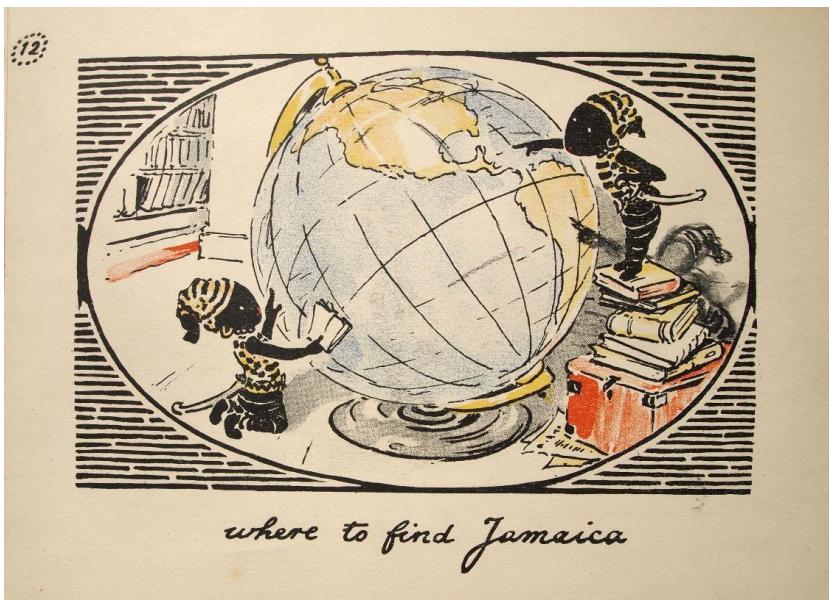


Faber and Faber 1929 edition, with WN's addition of a third Pirate (in the bathtub) for 'The Pirate Trips' [see below]. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

The Pirate Twins (1929) begins with the young child, Mary, finding an open scallop shell in the surf, which, by the third picture (when we are able to look inside and it has grown much bigger in relation to Mary) is shown to contain the Pirate Twins, two small black figures (they don't come up to Mary's waist) in antique pirate costumes: horizontal striped shirts, gold earrings, large buckled belts, and stocking caps. Mary, with a bouncy maternal bottom apparently caused by stuffing her dress into her underclothes to wade, takes them firmly by the hands and leads them home, where she starts bringing them up properly. She engages in bathing, feeding, teaching various lessons, and otherwise 'playing house' with these unexpectedly encountered seafarers. Their intractableness to domestic management is subtly evoked in the pictures first, then in the narrative, until the moment when they steal a boat and sail away, but always come back for Mary's birthday: a particularly festive picture with sun shining in the window, curtains blowing, gulls sailing by, and a fine cake.²⁹

There are mysteries in the text. The first is, who is raising Mary? She appears to be living a separate life in the house, which is apparently occupied by others who have a piratical taste for crustaceans, rich cake, and rum. The 'others' are never seen or referred to. The second is a question of what the Pirate Twins might be. They most resemble the cloth dolls that Nancy made in their minimalist faces, flexible arms, rounded feet, and adult proportions. But Nicholson enhances the possibilities already there. He gives them clever hands and an un-doll-like expressiveness. Moreover, their physical nature appears as waterproof and resilient and hungry as that of humans, though their size changes drastically to fit their different tasks. Their appearance, rising from the surf like Venus, is funny (although it is not part of the story, properly speaking, a kind of alternative creation myth on the endpaper), but the 'magical' aspect of the Twins is reinforced by Nicholson's framing of the pages. Schwartz's reference to Jacques Callot's inspiration in Nicholson's work, the 'transformations that come from seeing the world through a telescope' and the 'delights and deceptions' of looking, applies here (pp. 47-48). The size of the globe and

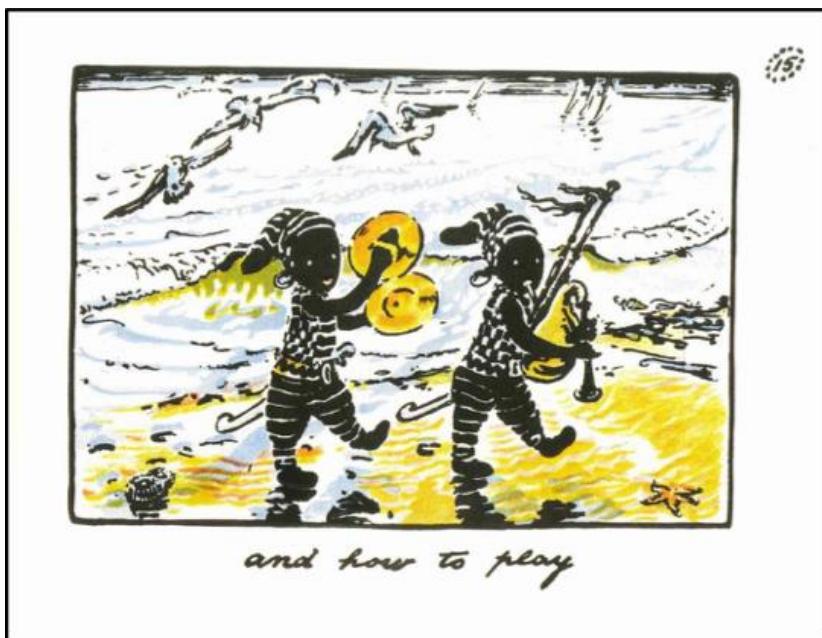
alphabet book, for example, is unknown, so the Twins' smaller stature next to these items cannot be judged. A more perplexing problem exists in the outdoor scenes of the Twins marching in the surf or looking at the Milky Way through telescopes. It is hard to see where or how the reader would need to be standing in order to see the Twins in this way, unless a lens of some kind is being used. And the boat! Is it a toy boat next to another toy boat on the beach? Or have the Twins become large enough to manage an ordinary craft?



A conundrum about size and a foreshadowing of the escape. Faber and Faber 1929 edition, with WN's preliminary sketch of a third Pirate. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

The 'new way of reading' that was a feature of the *Clever Bill* advertisements means that in order to experience the tension between Mary's desire for motherly play and the Twins' desire to go back to pirating, each image must be 'read' in order to see the signs of the impending rebellion: the little boat in the bath, the scimitars acquired from the dress-up trunk, the crossed bones and

knife on the cake plate, the snarling lobster, the sailor life in the alphabet book, the fact that the Twins have found the Caribbean on the globe. The pictures anticipate and amplify. They are the source of jokes, as well. To readers who know that Nicholson's still lifes, as Merlin Jones remarked, sometimes have to do with knives cutting and opening up,³⁰ it is intensely amusing that the 'revelation' is irresponsible parenting and neglect of kitchen safety.



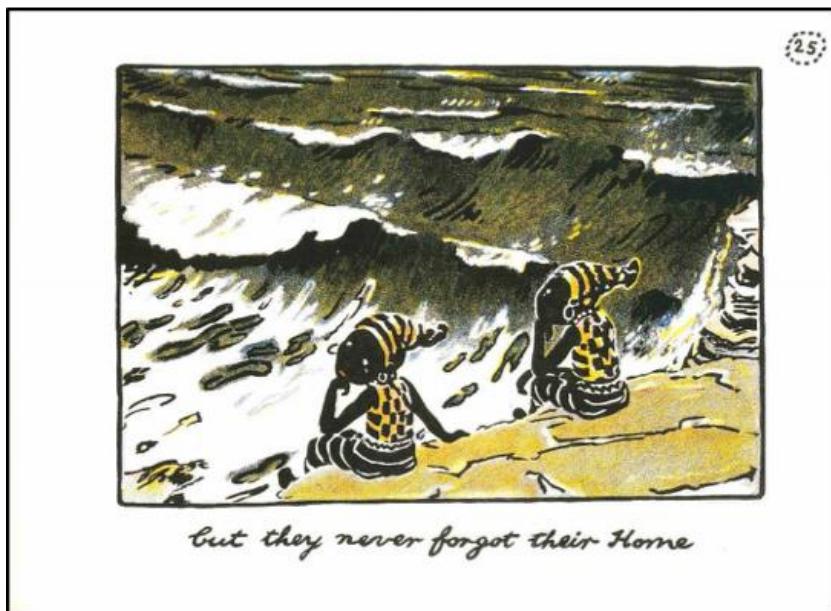
Arguably a turning point in the story: bagpipes may also allude to the Isle of Skye origin story. Andrew Jones Art, 2005. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

In terms of the Nicholson canon, a surprise occurs on the 'play' page before the overt rebellion: the eyes of the Pirates suddenly meet the gaze of the reader. They appear to have discovered that someone is looking at them. WN often did not paint a direct gaze; he favoured profiles when photographed and most often when he painted portraits (Schwartz, p. 84). And this is also the technique

in *Clever Bill* for Mary and her toy soldier. But the Pirates, while playing in the surf, are revealing themselves while making a discovery that changes the rest of the text. Their silent, but self-reflexive, moment apparently provides them with critical mass to do something about their situation.

The picture following the rebellious escapade (when the runaway Twins sit on a rocky cliff over turbulent grey waves with tears rolling down their faces) is also an important turning-point. ‘But they never forgot their home’ it says, and the left-hand twin looks over his shoulder directly at the reader, again. The Twins’ self-revelation can appear to be Nicholson’s as well. From his daughter Eliza’s point of view, the Pirates are her father because they were rebels as her father was, in some ways. He had, after all, run away to Paris to be an art student rather than accepting solid, middle-class prosperity; and he was devoted to his mother. She also mentions his tendency to hurry back to the women in his life (wives or mistresses) with bouquets.³¹ He was a member of the Whistler era in art. He refused to join the Royal Academy. He had the charm, graceful dexterity, unabashed tears, and mystery of the Pirate Twins. He was also witnessing the loss of homes and loved ones.

Although the authorial connection with the Twins is meaningful to those who admire his work, it does not really untangle the perplexities of gender and race variously raised in connection with the story. Picturebooks that depend upon pictures to convey narrative are always open to a variety of truths from a variety of readers. Modernist texts such as this one compound the difficulty. The issues can be looked at as a series of balancing acts, the kind that make the grotesque the grotesque: It is tedious that Mary (whose image in the book is greatly outweighed by that of the Twins) has the thankless role of trying to colonize the Twins. But she is young, and ‘house’ is an age-appropriate game. Additionally, she is imaginative (unlike Wendy), and the Twins enjoy her tutorial activities: she is their ‘home’. And Mary and the Cat are resilient; they are glad to see the Twins again, but there is no indication that they have been lost without them. They all seem to understand each other well.



but they never forgot their Home

Andrew Jones Art, 2005. William Nicholson's writings and drawings
©Desmond Banks.

There is no doubt that within the text (or within the autobiographical connections) the Pirate Twins are considered rebels against Mary's attempt to guide their activities, and that their colour as well as their mysterious seafaring origin may be considered a reason for this, where Mary is white and the Twins are black in a racist society. Enjoying the possibilities and the identity of being a Pirate Twin may be a position of strength for Nicholson as a man and artist. But it can be associated with stereotype for others, nonetheless. Playing dominoes in bed (the Twins' final rebellious act) is funny rather than horrific unless a reader feels that this activity reflects on the teachableness or rectitude of black *children* or, more likely, the author's ability to take such children seriously.³²

To colonized people, of course, the Twins' resistance *can* be and has been inspiring – they sailed away! Eliza Banks' interpretation of Nicholson's comings-and-goings in his relationships is not negatively present inside the book because there is no reason why these shipwrecked mariners *should* be converted to Mary's way of doing things. Their survival strategies are engaging and efficient.



and always came back

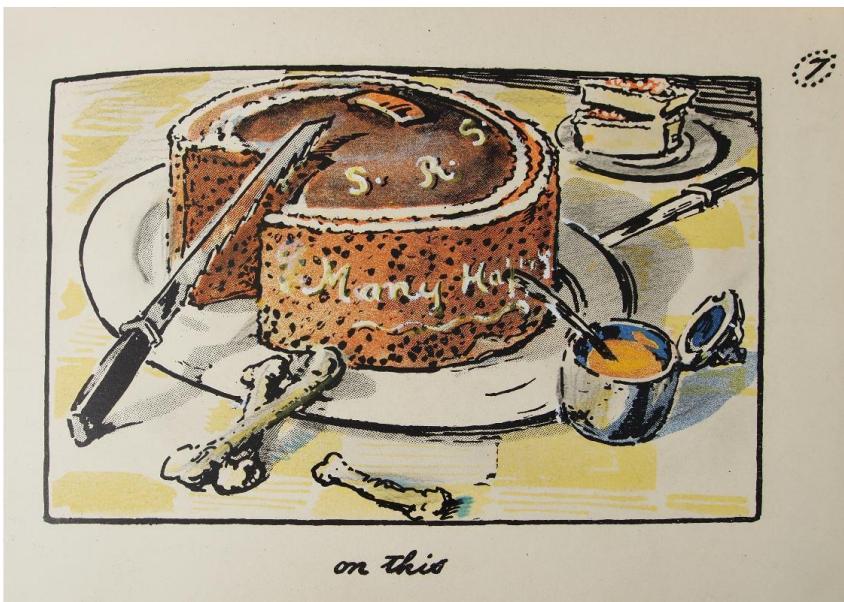
The addition of the Cat completes the harmonious reunion. The Pirate Twins had previously 'put things into' the cat's milk: polliwogs and hot sauce, apparently. Andrew Jones Art, 2005. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

They are not faithless; they are simply determined to live their lives in their own way. The happy ending 'always came back | in time for | Mary's birthday' is a bargain. The Twins love and miss Mary, but they come home on their own terms.

The Pirate Twins are a matter for personal judgment, but they were intended as role models, unlike the Barrie pirates who exist only to be vanquished. WN's pirates prevail. If they are a self-revelatory statement about himself, being true to oneself was a lesson he was willing to pass on. He left an incomplete version of

'The Pirate Trips' containing the initials of his son Ben Nicholson's and Barbara Hepworth's triplets (Sarah, Simon, and Rachel, born 1933) in icing on the rich cake. It is a copy of *The Pirate Twins* with an additional 'twin' added in the illustrations.

Faber and Faber, 1929, with WN's addition of his grandchildren's initials,



on this

birthday greeting on the side of the cake, and extra bone on the table.
William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

In reviewing the history of 'fantasy in everyday life' (or magical realism) in children's literature, critics often look to the work of E. Nesbit (1858-1924), in which parents are tidily sent off to warm climates for their health or otherwise out of the way so that children may encounter magic without awkward questions. *The Pirate Twins* and *Clever Bill* belong to this tradition. They are also artifacts of an era in which British children were frequently in the hands of caregivers who were not their parents, a recurring topic in the annals of the Graves / Nicholson children. From the beginning of Nicholson's publishing career – his *An Alphabet*, his *London Types*, his wartime picture 'A Belgian of Tomorrow', those *Peter Pan*

pirates – he had demonstrated a belief that children are tough and capable.

But Mary's lone state (not surrounded by other family children or helpers next to the sea that gives and takes away, surrounded by mystery), hints at the inner resources and spunk that such a child must have. Written at a time when the golden Sutton Veny days were in the past, hellos and good-byes are not casually conceived. Mythic echoes of the Selkie Girl, who returns to the sea, creep in. The grotesque, which makes it hard for the story's admirers and repudiators to clarify their discussion, also balances the hilarious and the sad.



One of nine sketches of the Pirate Twins intended for a calendar. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.



Another sketch of the Pirate Twins. William Nicholson's writings and drawings ©Desmond Banks.

Marilynn Strasser Olson, distinguished professor emerita, English Department, Texas State University, was an associate editor and editor of the *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* from 1991–2000. *Children's Culture and the Avant-Garde* (2012) and subsequent essays concern the connection of children's literature and art; Olson has contributed to articles on astronomy, art, and literature with her husband, Donald W. Olson. She is currently co-editing a study of favourite presidential childhood.

NOTES

¹ William Nicholson, *The Pirate Twins* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929). There was an American edition (New York: Coward-McCann, 1929), but WN called the colours ‘poisonous’.

² Sam Graves postcard (does not contain year), courtesy of Carola Stuart Wortley. Additional card from Sam Graves, 4 July 2015, courtesy of Carola Stuart Wortley. The role of Nancy Nicholson with a photo of the dolls is discussed in Colin Campbell, *William Nicholson: The Graphic Work* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1992), p. 161.

³ Sam Graves and Georgina email to Eliza Banks, 3 September 2013, courtesy of Eliza Banks. Nancy told Sam their names.

⁴ The Maurice Sendak estate owns Alexander and Bartholomew. Stuart Wortley owns the other two remaining dolls, which she thinks might have been Jenny’s. Stuart Wortley email to the author, 8 July 2015.

⁵ Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves: The Assault Heroic, 1895–1926* (Stratford, ON: Viking Canada, 1987), p. 216.

⁶ Florence Upton intended to make an abused minstrel-style doll that had been used as a throwing target (probably for ‘Aunt Sally’) into a hero. She did (in her own books), but there are obvious problems. Marilynn S. Olson, *Children's Culture and the Avant-Garde* (New York and London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 19–33.

⁷ Carola Stuart Wortley email to the author, 8 July 2015.

⁸ Eliza Banks email to the author, 28 September 2013.

⁹ Quotation on the back cover of the 2005 edition of *The Pirate Twins* (London: Andre Jones Art, 2005). The quotation originated in Maurice Sendak’s letter to Andrew Jones September 2004. Used by permission of Maurice Sendak. Sendak mentions *The Pirate Twins* as an influence

on *Where the Wild Things Are*: Maurice Sendak, *Caldecott & Co.* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1988), p. 166.

¹⁰ Greg M. Smith, ‘Comics in the Intersecting Histories of the Window, the Frame, and the Panel’, in *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*, ed. by Daniel Stein and Jan-Noël Thon (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), p. 230.

¹¹ Nathalie op de Beeck, ‘Suspended Animation: Picture Book Storytelling, Twentieth-Century Childhood, and William Nicholson’s *Clever Bill*’, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 30.1 (2006), 64-65.

¹² Eliza Banks, Unpublished manuscript. Copyright Desmond Banks.

¹³ Banks, manuscript; see also *William Nicholson, Painter*, ed. by Andrew Nicholson (London: Giles de la Mare, 1996), pp. 198-208 for evocations of the Sutton Veny period, including essays by Eliza Banks, her half-sister Anne, and friend of Kit Nicholson, Frank Sykes.

¹⁴ Banks, manuscript.

¹⁵ Carola Stuart Wortley email to Desmond Banks and the author, 7 July 2015.

¹⁶ Patricia Reed, *William Nicholson: Catalogue Raisonné of the Oil Paintings* (London: Modern Art Press / Yale UP, 2011), p. 124. It is #109: ‘Nancy, the Girl with the Pewter Mug’ [The Little Serving Maid] (1907).

¹⁷ See, for example, Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Robert Graves: From Great War Poet to Good-Bye to All That, 1895-1929* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 352-95. Catherine (Nicholson) Dalton (RG and Nancy’s younger daughter) wrote a remembrance about her mother and those days in *The Nicholsons: A Story of Four People and their Designs* (York: York City Art Gallery, 1988), pp. 43-47. It is accompanied by two other essays about Nancy’s later years.

¹⁸ Elaine Moss, ‘*Clever Bill*: William Nicholson, Children & Picture Books’, *Signal*, 80 (May 1996), 98-104; Sanford Schwartz, *William Nicholson* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2004), p. 246.

¹⁹ Marguerite Steen, *William Nicholson* (London: Collins, 1943), pp. 95-99. (Note: racist language.)

²⁰ Costume sketches in conte crayon (?) on brown paper are at the University of Texas Harry Ransom Center (Humanities Research Center), Austin, in the B. J. Simmons & Co. costume design records accessed via *Peter Pan* costumes 1904. The Karpeles Manuscript Library has the coloured and finished sketches shown here.

²¹ J. M. Barrier, *Peter Pan*, ed. by Anne Hiebert Alton (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2011), p. 91.

²² Roger Lancelyn Green, *Fifty Years of Peter Pan* (London: Peter Davies, 1954), pp. 91-92; Daphne Du Maurier on her father's performance of Hook.

²³ Schwartz, p. 323.

²⁴ Steen, p. 28; Schwartz, pp. 36, 45-46, 157, 245.

²⁵ Alexandre Dumas, *Georges*, ed. and with introduction by Werner Sollors, trans. by Tina A. Kover . Foreword by Jamaica Kincaid (New York: Modern Library, 2008), p. 292.

²⁶ Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), p. 334.

²⁷ Schwartz devotes the entire final chapter (13) in his critical biography to the discussion of the implications of African ancestry in WN's work.

²⁸ Email from Eliza Banks to author 28 September 2013.

²⁹ Discussion of the pioneering nature of the story can be found in Brian Alderson, *Sing a Song for Sixpence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), pp. 90, 104 (on melding of text and colour with lithography); Barbara Bader, *American Picturebooks: From Noah's Ark to the Beast Within* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 60-61; Marilynn S. Olson, *Children's Culture and the Avant-Garde* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 57-88.

³⁰ Merlin James, 'Words about Painting', in Colin Campbell, *William Nicholson* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2004), pp. 23-27.

³¹ Moss, p. 103; Schwartz, p. 246.

³² Schwartz, p. 246; *The Graphic Work*, p. 161.

Robert Graves's Favourite Poem? The One that Saved his Life

Paul O'Prey

Abstract: This essay is a bio-critical analysis of Robert Graves's sonnet, 'The Troll's Nosegay', paying particular attention to Graves's urgency in writing the poem while he was sick with Spanish flu.

Keywords: Sonnets, Spanish flu, William Nicholson, Nancy Nicholson

Along with a great many people around the world, in March 2020 I was struck down with the Coronavirus and was forced to spend a number of days quarantined in a spare room until the illness ran its course. While unwell, I was buoyed by kind messages from family and friends, including a get-well email from Lucia Graves, Robert's daughter, with 'The Troll's Nosegay' attached for me to read. She said how she often thought of this poem during the dark and disconcerting days of the current pandemic, and of how she owed her very existence to it.

Robert had written the poem in March 1919, exactly a hundred and one years ago, while he was fighting for his life against Spanish flu. Indeed, he had written it on his sickbed just a few hundred yards away from where I was reading it during my own struggle with a global virus. He later said that a determination to get the poem right – he took it through thirty-five drafts before he was satisfied – was what kept him from succumbing to the illness that for him had developed into a dangerous case of septic pneumonia. He was twenty-three years old.

The Spanish flu took hold in the final months of the First World War and quickly spread around the globe, infecting roughly a third of the human population. It proved to be more deadly even than

the war, with some fifty million dying from the disease compared to ten million killed in the war. Despite its name, the disease did not originate in Spain, where in its early stages it was nicknamed ‘the soldier from Naples’, after a popular music hall hit at the time that was also very catchy.

Robert initially developed symptoms while he was stationed with his regiment at Limerick. He was a captain with the Royal Welch Fusiliers and had been so badly wounded at the Somme that he was initially left for dead in a corner of a field dressing station. His main injury was caused by a piece of shell that hit him in the chest, leaving him with a damaged lung that made him particularly susceptible to the pneumonia that was a common complication of the Spanish flu. Feeling unwell and desperate to get home, he managed to secure his demobilization by rather recklessly by-passing the official channels, and he set off across the Irish Sea to join his wife Nancy and their baby daughter Jenny who were in Hove.

Robert and Nancy Nicholson had married just over a year before, in January 1918, at St James’s Church in Piccadilly. George Mallory, the mountaineer who later died on Mt Everest, was best man and other guests included his fellow soldier poet Wilfred Owen. Nancy’s father was William Nicholson and her brother Ben Nicholson, two highly successful and renowned artists. Nancy served as a Land Girl during the war and was herself a superb illustrator. One idea she and Robert had for making money was for her to illustrate some of Robert’s poems. This produced a series of whimsical and witty poems from Robert which were strikingly visual and evocative of themes such as innocence and love in a pastoral setting – the diametric opposite of the poems about his experience in the trenches, which he was now trying desperately to leave behind him.

In their definitive edition of Graves’s poems, Dunstan Ward and Beryl Graves (Robert’s second wife) tell us that one such poem, ‘Love Without Hope’, was inspired by a sketch by William Nicholson which he sent to them as an idea, being ‘just the thing’ for a Robert poem illustrated by Nancy. Nicholson’s sketch showed a portly but audacious bird-catcher lifting his hat to a beautiful lady (‘the Squire’s own daughter’) who wears a flowing dress and

carries a parasol. As the bird-catcher bows to doff his top hat, larks ‘escape’ from beneath it and fly singing around the startled woman’s head.¹ ‘The Troll’s Nosegay’ would seem to be another such poem on a similar theme, though the troll came first, pre-dating the bird-catcher by some two years. A capricious lady is courted by an audacious troll who, although ridiculous in his presumption, startles the object of his devotion by conjuring up a bouquet of summer flowers in the depths of winter.

In January 1919, Robert and Nancy had yet to set up permanent home together. William Nicholson offered to rent a house for them in Hove so that their baby would come into a world of healthy fresh air. He himself had a house and studio at the other end of Brighton beach next to where Rudyard Kipling had lived until 1902. The house he rented for them was 11 Seaside Villas on Western Esplanade, one of an exclusive row of eleven newly-built houses next to Hove Lagoon. Eight years later, fellow Royal Welch Fusilier poet and artist David Jones was to spend the summer at number 5, where, thanks to the remarkable light and the continuous influence of the sea, he felt he had produced some of his best paintings.² In more recent years this short row of houses has been home for a number of musicians, writers and celebrities, including Adele, Fat Boy Slim, Zoe Ball, David Walliams and Heather Mills, wife of Paul McCartney. The houses come with their own stretch of private beach, which in January would have provided a bracing environment for Robert and his family, with a reliably strong wind blowing off the English Channel and waves pounding the shingle outside their windows.

Nicholson’s hope for a healthy environment for the baby ended abruptly when she was four weeks old and her father arrived home, seriously unwell and highly infectious. When Robert entered the house, the first thing he saw was the ghost of Nancy’s mother, who had died of Spanish flu a few months earlier. He was already delirious. Nancy soon started to feel unwell, and the rest of the household also went down, including an aunt and a family friend. Fortunately, Jenny and her grandfather were not affected.

Finding medical help in the pandemic was difficult but Nicholson managed to engage two ex-nurses to help look after those who were unwell. One was competent but frequently drunk, the other was incompetent but at least sober and would irritate them all by standing at the window, spreading her arms and declaiming: ‘Sea, sea, give my husband back to me.’ Apparently her husband was not drowned but unfaithful.³

A doctor visited and told Robert that pneumonia in both lungs had developed into sepsis and his chances of recovery were low. Robert was however determined to survive and put all his energy and concentration into writing and perfecting ‘The Troll’s Nosegay’.

The poem presents a comic scene with vivid economy. A troll is in love with a lady who wants a bouquet of flowers, even though it is winter. If he really loved her, he would find her flowers somewhere. She begins to cry which the troll finds intolerable, and he swears to give her all the flowers she could ever want, enough to satisfy even ‘a China Queen’. Trolls at that time were rare creatures in English literature and this poem is one of the first sightings of the mythical creature in British poetry. Robert would have come across trolls primarily in the Brothers Grimm story of ‘Three Billy Goats Gruff’ and a number of Hans Christian Andersen’s stories, notably ‘The Ice Queen’ and ‘The Travelling Companion’, in which a troll bewitches a beautiful and capricious princess who sets impossible challenges for her suitors.

There are many types of troll in Scandinavian legend, from giant, violent ogres to dwarfish woodland spirits who are spiteful, mischievous, ugly, and good at magic (in some stories, ‘troll’ is translated as magician).⁴ Robert’s troll is of the latter kind and derives from the Andersen stories, but I also suspect that the idea of the ungainly but presumptuous troll courting the beautiful, unattainable lady may owe its provenance to a set of famous troll illustrations by the Swedish painter John Bauer, who had died in 1918. One of Bauer’s most famous troll pictures, published in 1913, shows a beautiful fair maiden with golden hair and a flowing white dress, with two small, comically misshapen, grotesque, slouching trolls. Bauer’s extraordinary success with these illustrations may

well have given Robert the idea of a poem for illustration by Nancy that might have a similar popular appeal.

The troll in the poem uses his magical powers to conjure up an impressive bouquet. Robert and his contemporary readers would have been familiar with the ‘language of flowers’ which was such a part of Victorian and Edwardian popular culture, in which a bouquet would convey a number of coded messages. In *The Language and Poetry of Flowers*, one of the most popular ‘flower dictionaries’ of the time, the ‘intelligent reader’ is promised that ‘under the guidance of this little volume, many a bright nosegay may exchange hands, and tell, in its fitting and intelligible language, a welcome message to a fair lady’s ear’.⁵ The troll’s nosegay contains lilies for pureness, roses for love and mignonettes for ‘your qualities surpass your charms’. A conventional message on the face of it, but these flowers are not what they seem. The white lily is only ‘drawn’ and not with a pencil but with a cold and misty fog. The rose is pale rather than red and formed of ‘mist-magic’. The mignonette is ‘elvish’ and ‘unsubstantial’. Along with other ‘vague’ blooms conjured from ‘wandering dreams’, these flowers are set not in a vase but a cauldron, which suggests witchcraft. The troll’s flowers are remarkable not for their beauty but for their coldness, paleness and illusory nature. The message hidden in the troll’s nosegay is not to be trusted.

The lady takes her nosegay and she is again moved to tears but this time she cries because she is so charmed by the magnificence of the gesture and confused by the magical appearance of such wonderful blossoms. Then the last line turns from gratitude to petulance. Like the princess in Hans Christian Andersen, she had set her suitor an impossible challenge, expecting him to fail and be found wanting. When he surprised her by succeeding in his task, this turned out to be really rather annoying.

Robert’s biographer Richard Perceval Graves suggests that ‘The Troll’s Nosegay’ is an early hint of trouble to come in Robert’s marriage to Nancy. She apparently had a ‘strongly capricious streak’ but Robert was so much in love that for a while at least he responded lovingly to her whims.⁶ The critic Peter Sanders has seen in the

poem evidence of ‘a curious ambivalence’ in Graves’s attitude toward love, ‘a reluctance to give himself up to love entirely’.⁷ Others may find in the poem a harbinger of another relationship that was to obsess Robert in later years, that between a poet and his muse, in which with ‘a boy’s presumption’ he sought ‘to court the queen in her high silk pavilion’ (*The Face in the Mirror*) by conjuring up a world made of words.

‘The Troll’s Nosegay’ was for Robert a rare experiment with the sonnet. There are fourteen decasyllabic lines, but they do not resemble any of the more common sonnet rhyme schemes. The first two quatrains follow the English or Shakespearean rhyme scheme: ABAB CDCC. The first quatrain sets the test of love: the lady demands a nosegay of summer flowers in winter as proof of love. The second is the acceptance of challenge. This is followed by a sestet with an unorthodox rhyme scheme, EFFEFE, which suggests trollish confusion and disruption. Here the troll meets the test but the lady is not wholly won, for she is both charmed and piqued by his success.

Each section marks a twist and a turn in the tussle between the presumptuous suitor and the capricious lady. The opening line sets the tone of cut and thrust with a demand, an exclamation, a hard caesura, and then a question: ‘A simple nosegay! Was that much to ask?’. The poem does not end with the rhyming couplet expected in an English Sonnet, which would bring resolution to the affair or point to triumph for one or other of the adversaries. Instead the penultimate line steps gradually down the page, breaking into five separate lines, drawing out the sense of exasperation at such capriciousness, leading into the final line where the rhyme scheme is turned back on itself. No one wins this particular courtship contest, it’s a draw.

Robert Graves was rather ruthless in omitting his early poems from later collections of his poetry. ‘The Troll’s Nosegay’ is however one of the relatively few survivors of 1919 to make it all the way through to his *Collected Poems 1975*. Whether this is because he truly thought it to be one of his best poems, or because he had a sentimental attachment to the poem that had saved his life, we do not know. He does though give a clue in a letter written in 1962 in

response to an invitation to choose an overall favourite from among his many poems for inclusion in an anthology, *Poet's Choice*, edited by Paul Engle and Joseph Langland.⁸ He chose 'The Troll's Nosegay' and explained how he had written it when he had Spanish flu:

My temperature rose to 105, and both lungs were affected. The over-worked doctor said I had no chance, the household wept openly, but one thing kept me alive: the obstinate intention of getting my poem right. It had already gone into several drafts, and I wasn't going to be beaten by it. The technical problem was how to make a sonnet read as though it were not a sonnet, while keeping the rules. By the thirty-fifth draft I had all but solved this, and was tottering about on a stick. "The Troll's Nosegay" saved my life, and I'm grateful. It has since gone into a thirty-sixth, perhaps semifinal, draft. No poem is ever perfected'.⁹

Republished with permission from the *Journal of the War Poets Association: War Poetry Review*, 2020.

Paul O'Prey is a poet, anthologist, translator and scholar. His most recent book of poems *Fleet* (Melos Press) traces the course of London's buried river. Other works include two anthologies, *Poems from the Front* and *Counter-Wave: Poetry of Rescue in the First World War*, two volumes of Robert Graves's *Selected Letters* (Hutchinson), his *Selected Poems* (Penguin), and *Collected Writings on Poetry* (Carcanet).

NOTES

¹ Robert Graves, *Complete Poems*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward, 3 vols (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), I, pp. 402-03.

² Thomas Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2017), chapter 7.

³ Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That* (London: Cape, 1929), p. 350.

⁴ For a full survey of trolls in literature and art see John Lindow, *Trolls: An Unnatural History* (London: Reaktion, 2014).

⁵ *The Language and Poetry of Flowers* (New York: T. Nelson and Sons, 1857), p. iv.

⁶ Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves: The Assault Heroic 1895-1926* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986), p. 208.

⁷ Peter L. Sanders, 'Robert Graves – A Poet's Quest for Meaning', *The English Journal*, 59 (January 1970), 24.

⁸ *The Poet's Choice*, ed. by Paul England and Joseph Langland (New York: Time, 1966).

⁹ *Complete Poems*, I, pp. 364-65.

Drawing Music from Penny Fiddles, or, a Biographical Account of Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke's Secret Lives as Children's Poets with a Look at their Neglected Masterworks, *The Penny Fiddle* and *I Am! Says the Lamb*, along with a Few Other Things

Joseph T. Thomas, Jr.

Abstract: This essay brings into conversation the lives of Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke, two oddly similar yet dissimilar poets, and argues that by exploring the many correspondences within their lives and work, we may deepen the growing discussion of Graves's children's work while broadening it to illuminate the children's works of Roethke, which have yet to have been substantially reappraised.

Keywords: English poetry, American poetry, children's poetry, literary biography

Robert Graves and Theodore Roethke seem an unlikely pair. They didn't travel in the same circles, nor are they commonly linked in academic discourse. Nevertheless, they have more in common than most would suspect. Their work was profoundly influenced by nursery rhyme, nonsense, and folk poetry, influences that corresponded with their serious interest in childhood and childhood's poetry. In the span of two years, each published an extraordinary collection of children's poetry: *The Penny Fiddle* (1960)¹ and *I Am! Says the Lamb* (1961),² respectively. Both collections are out of print, both have largely been neglected by the critical and scholarly communities surrounding the poets (and by the children's literature community as well), and both deserve more attention. Both

collections are a hodgepodge of poems gathered together not because they were all written as children's poems – some were, certainly, but only some – but because they live in a folklorish register, drawing on diction, meters, and images associated with traditional folk poetry, because both poets believed the poems – even those originally written for adults – were pitched within the hearing of most children.³

Like *I Am!*, Robert Graves's *The Penny Fiddle* pulls no punches. Sweetly archaic and even old fashioned in places (even for 1960), *The Penny Fiddle* still manages to speak to its child readers of love and death with a candour that might alarm twenty-first-century audiences.⁴ Nearly all of the poems in *The Penny Fiddle* indirectly concern poetry and poets. However, the volume's penultimate poem ('How and Why') is the only to speak of poets directly, and apt for a poem preceding 'Warning to Children', it speaks of their death. Graves may not have known Roethke personally, but he was well acquainted with the vices many poets share. Graves drew upon that familiarity to craft a short, darkly comic children's poem that in its brief litany of how poets die describes two deaths that fit our unlikely brace of writers uncannily well. Its black humour and specificity would have doubtlessly charmed Roethke:

How and why
Poets die,
That's a dismal tale:
Some take a spill
On Guinea Hill,
Some drown in ale.

Some get lost
At sea, or crossed
In love with cruel witches;
Yet some attain
Long life and reign
Like Popes among their riches.

The relevant prognostications occur at the end of each stanza (for Roethke, line six; for Graves himself, lines ten to twelve). You see, although Roethke was thirteen years younger than Graves, he would die twenty-two years before him. (Roethke lived from 1908 to 1963; Graves from 1895 to 1985.) Roethke was a heavy drinker throughout his life, but during his final years ‘he was frequently in a state of manic excitement’. He self-medicated with alcohol, drinking ‘a good deal to control’ his mania, often taking ‘a glass of beer the first thing in the morning’.⁵ On the day he died, Roethke was visiting a friend’s house on Bainbridge Island in Washington. A bear of a man, he had just prepared a round of mint juleps when he was brought down by a coronary occlusion while enjoying the pool. Tragically, Beatrice (his wife) was across the Elliott Bay at the time, shopping in Seattle. Roethke was only fifty-five years old. Graves, meanwhile, continued working for some twelve years after Roethke’s last swim. A decade later Graves’s long life came to an end. Coincidentally, Graves also died on an island, Mallorca, where he succumbed to heart failure while resting in his lovely, two-story home of mortar and locally quarried stone. Graves’s death was front-page news, *The New York Times* reporting that Graves ‘died with his wife and other family members at his bedside. [...] Church bells on the island rang out with a traditional song of mourning at the news of his death’.⁶ He was buried in the local churchyard.⁷ No, Roethke didn’t literally ‘drown in ale’, nor did Graves quite live like ‘Popes among their riches’. Still, ‘How and Why’ didn’t miss the mark by much.

It’s unclear exactly how Roethke felt about Graves’s poetry, but we find evidence of his increased interest in Graves around the time Roethke began writing for children in earnest. Published three years before *I Am!* Roethke’s *Words for the Wind* (1958)⁸ is his first book to include a section marked as children’s poetry: ‘Lighter Pieces and Poems for Children’. That same year, poet James Wright (who was completing his Ph. D. with Roethke at the University of Washington) received a letter from Roethke containing a frank (and frankly rare) appraisal of Robert Graves’s work. Roethke confesses,

Been reading [Robert] Graves and [Wallace] Stevens lately, and damned if I don't think both are over-rated. I get so tired of Stevens' doodling with a subject-matter – the same subject-matter. And Graves, while at least he's specific, is usually *thin*, I think.⁹

While by no means praise, his assessment grants both Graves's reputation (one tends to reserve *over-rated* for those who are highly esteemed) and his poetical exactness (*specificity*), which was a characteristic Roethke admired in poetry. Furthermore, while usually unguarded in his literary opinions, here Roethke marks his chief criticism (*thin*) with the qualification, 'I think'. A year later in 'How to Write Like Somebody Else' (1959), Roethke reveals his familiarity with Graves by way of praising W. H. Auden. He asks the rhetorical question, 'Is Auden a charlatan because he read and profited by reading [Wilfred] Owen, Laura Riding, Robert Graves'?¹⁰ Roethke traces this influence with specificity – he knows Graves's work – choosing to illustrate his claim by comparing Graves's 'Full Moon' with Auden's 'As I Walked Out One Evening', noting the similar opening (Graves: 'As I walked out that sultry night'; Auden: 'As I walked out one evening') as well as a passel of imagistic echoes ('the street, the wheat, the fields') (*On Poetry*, p. 60).

During this period Roethke also made regular use of Graves's poetry in his courses at U. W., where Roethke taught for fifteen years. In *The Glass House: The Life of Theodore Roethke*, Allen Seager reproduces some student notes taken in one of Roethke's U.W. seminars. At the top of the page in pen are the student's handwritten words: 'Class Goodies'. A preponderance of said goodies concerns poetry (for example, the student records Roethke's characterisation of poetry: 'memorable speech').¹¹ Shortly before this concise definition, we find three telling words: 'Start Robert Graves' (Seager, p.181). It's unclear which of Graves's many books our student was to begin, but it is likely *The Poems of Robert Graves: Chosen by Himself* (New York: Anchor, 1958), for, in a 1961 letter to Dorothee Bowie (the U. W. English Department's

secretary), Roethke specifies the books he would like included in (what he calls) ‘the Verse Course’. He mentions four texts, the first three of which are

The English Galaxy edited by [Gerald] Bullet [sic] in the Everyman edition

Robert Graves Poems chosen by himself [sic] in the Anchor edition

Yvor Winters *collected poems* [sic] Swallow Press.

The fourth is ‘Louis Untermeyer’s combined anthology of British and American Poetry. The earlier edition that they always ordered *not* the last one’.¹² Note that Graves’s collection sprang second to Roethke’s mind. (Untermeyer’s inclusion there at the end suggests that this is not an alphabetised list, but, even if it were, Graves’s *Poems* is one of only two single-author collections.) At the very least, Graves’s poetry had pedagogical value for Roethke. (And he took pedagogy very seriously indeed, earning the admiration of his students, who reportedly evinced ‘the air of disciples’).¹³

Theodore Roethke isn’t mentioned in Graves’s biographies, but, frankly, for much of the twentieth century mentions of Graves’s life as a children’s poet have appeared only slightly more often in the discourse surrounding Graves’s own life and work. And if Graves isn’t mentioned often in treatments of Roethke’s life, neither are *Roethke’s* children’s books, something rather strange that they also have in common, along with a penchant for thinking of themselves as bears. (Something we’ll return to in a moment.) Doubtlessly, Graves was familiar with Roethke’s work (a voracious reader invested in keeping up with developments in the poetry world, Graves surely read Roethke’s *The Waking*, which was awarded the Pulitzer in 1954),¹⁴ and he may have been familiar with Roethke’s children’s poetry, as both participated in Louis Untermeyer’s ambitious *Modern Masters Books for Children* series in the 1960s, Graves contributing *The Big Green Book* (1962) and *Roethke Party at the Zoo* (1963).¹⁵

The back cover of *Party at the Zoo* briefly characterises the series, bragging that Untermeyer had put together ‘a unique new series for the beginning reader by such world-famous authors as Arthur Miller, Shirley Jackson, and Robert Graves’. Its uniqueness lay not only in its stable of extraordinary authors, but also in the fact that the books married those authors with reading specialists. Following the example of the Harper and Brothers’ I Can Read Books and Random House’s series of Beginner Books, those specialists sent their authors limited vocabulary lists, akin to the approach Dr Seuss (Theodor Geisel) used to produce his 236 word *The Cat in the Hat* (New York: Random House, 1957). Unfortunately, as Lissa Paul explains,

The series fizzled out within a couple of years, despite the fact that the famous American poet and anthologist Louis Untermeyer had managed to attract manuscripts from some of the literary giants of the day [...]. The reading specialists employed for the project had no qualms about sending controlled vocabulary lists to famous authors. Those who obeyed wrote terrible books. Those who resisted often wrote terrific books – which, sadly, sank with the series.¹⁶

Of *The Big Green Book* and *Party at the Zoo*, Graves’s is obviously superior (Roethke was one of the Modern Masters who dutifully limited himself to a circumscribed vocabulary, in his case, a list of only 268 basic words). Both books appeared just as the two poets became more professionally invested in publishing for children. *The Big Green Book* was published in 1962, two years after *The Penny Fiddle*. However, Michael Joseph reminds us that:

Although Graves wrote poems he hoped to publish for children as early as 1916, [...] it was not until he had produced *The Big Green Book* (1962) [...] that he gathered them into two slim volumes, *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children* (1960) and *Ann at Highwood Hall* (1964).¹⁷

And yet, again, not much attention was paid to Graves's children's work over much of the twentieth century, another correspondence he shared with Roethke: but as the twenty-first century has deepened, we've seen increased study of Graves the children's writer, in general, and of Graves the children's poet, in particular. This interest has been driven by the scholarship of Michael Joseph, whose work certainly inspired this essay.¹⁸ Since 2010, when Joseph published "*The Penny Fiddle and Poetic Truth: The Children's Poems of Robert Graves*" in *Poetry and Childhood*,¹⁹ Robert Graves scholars have begun to recognise the importance of his children's poetry – and the importance of 'children's poetry' to Graves. By exploring the correspondences between Roethke and Graves, these oddly similar yet dissimilar poets, we may deepen the growing discussion of Graves's children's work, while broadening it to illuminate the children's works of Roethke, which have yet to have been substantially reappraised.

Still, Robert Graves's early interest in nursery rhyme has often been hedged or downplayed, even in very recent studies of his life and work. For example, in Jean Moorcroft Wilson's 2018 biography, *Robert Graves: From Great War Poet to Good-Bye to All That 1895-1929*, Graves's abiding preoccupation with the 'joyous foolery' of the nursery rhyme²⁰ is characterised as a 'private world' that he and his then-wife Nancy Nicholson 'inhabited together' (p. 216), one inspired and fuelled by Nicholson, who 'had a significant effect on Robert's poetry for some years, leading him further into a world of nursery rhyme and song' (p. 214). There it's something of the primrose path here, along with the subtle implication that it's a path Nicholson's domestic and perhaps even womanly influence led Graves down. (Admittedly, Graves himself is not innocent of such insinuation: recall 'A First Review', which closes *Country Sentiment* [1920],²¹ in which Tom [modelled on Siegfried Sassoon], a masculine, 'hard and bloody chap', exhorts him to 'have done with nursery pap' and 'Write like a man').²² Elsewhere, Wilson argues that 'Robert's increased focus on nursery rhymes and ballads was partly to provide Nancy with material to illustrate' (Wilson, p. 224). If his focus on nursery rhymes was only *partly* to produce something

for Nicholson to illustrate, his other reasons are tellingly left unremarked upon.²³

Similarly, when Roethke's children's poetry is mentioned at all in the criticism and scholarship surrounding him, it is relegated to footnotes and parentheticals, as if an embarrassment. This hesitance to explore children's poetry is common in the world of adult poetry criticism and scholarship – especially in the United States. Readers of *The Cambridge History of American Poetry* (2015) will not encounter a single chapter focusing on an individual children's poet, and one could read the lone, extended treatment of Theodore Roethke and come away completely ignorant of Roethke's forays into children's poetry.²⁴ More recently, only two essays in *A Field Guide to the Poetry of Theodore Roethke* (2020) mention Roethke's interest in children's poetry.²⁵ The first, Nicholas Bradley's 'Spirit, Self, and Shorebirds: The Pacific Pastoral of "Meditation at Oyster River"', raises the spectre of *I Am!* Not to discuss the poetry within, but only to note that it was in a review of *I Am!* That Ralph J. Mills Jr. first identified the traces of Whitman, Wordsworth, and John Clare in *The Far Field*'s 'Meditation at Oyster River' (and, as is convention, Bradley squirrels away his single reference to *I Am!* in an endnote). The second essay (mine) engages more substantially with his children's poetry, but I suspect that it appears in the *Field Guide* only because the editor, William Barillas, organised the book around every collection of poetry Roethke published in his life, using *The Complete Poems* as a blueprint. Luckily, *I Am!* is represented in Roethke's *Complete Poems*.²⁶ Each essay focuses on one poem. *The Far Field* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964) receives the most attention (fourteen of its poems are granted a single chapter each), but only one book is represented by a single essay: *I Am!* (breaking the volume's constraint (one poem per essay) I use my space to treat three of Roethke's children's poems). I was chosen to contribute that essay simply because I am the only scholar who has written at length on the subject.²⁷

Roethke was an imposing figure with incredible earthly appetites. In 'Fifty Years of American Poetry', Randall Jarrell, surely inspired in no small part by Roethke's cherubic, pinchable cheeks, famously

characterised him as a ‘sometimes babyish’ poet. However, Jarrell clarifies that Roethke ‘is a powerful Donatello baby who has love affairs, and whose marsh-like unconscious is continually celebrating its marriage with the whole wet dark underside of things’.²⁸

Roethke embraced this persona. Seager points to Roethke’s 1960 interview with Zulfikar Ghose, an interview in which, Seager explains, Roethke ‘reveals the picture of himself he wanted to show the public then’ (Seager, p. 268). The piece is called ‘Roethke: I Ran with the Roaring Boys’ and begins, ‘Roethke is a large man with an attractive head, round-cheeked, and thinned greying hair. He has a deep sonorous voice with an incantatory ring about it’ (qtd. in Seager, p. 268). Again, Roethke embraced his size, his deep voice, liking to imagine himself ‘as a sort of dancing bear’, a beast of a man animated by a love of wine, song, and poetry.²⁹ As Hamilton has it, Roethke was ‘a big – some might say gross – man and yet at poetry readings he would literally dance to his own rhythms’.³⁰ He signalled as much in his verse. For instance, in the first of his ‘Four for Sir John Davies’ (‘The Dance’), our ursiform poet aligns himself with the great beasts, insisting,

I need a place to sing, and dancing-room,
And I have made a promise to my ears
I’ll sing and whistle romping with the bears. (pp. 5-6)

His use of ‘romp’ here is telling. In the ‘Greenhouse Poems’ section of *I Am!*, we find another poem concerning dance, ‘My Papa’s Waltz’, in which Roethke also uses the word (‘We romped until the pans | Slid from the kitchen shelf’), tying it both to difficult, yet ultimately joyful familial love and the Dionysian appetite for drink that makes the aforementioned love so difficult (Roethke embodied that difficulty in the meter: ‘We romped until the pans’ is perfectly iambic, whereas the pans slide from the shelf trochaically. However, despite the substitution, ‘Slid from the kitchen shelf’ retains the drunken waltz’s three strong beats, ending smoothly with two iambs). Roethke would come to share this appetite with his father: you’ll recall the mint juleps he prepared on the day he died, wading

in a pool like a bear (Seager, p. 285). Such waltzing may not be easy, but it is fun while it lasts.

A large man, Graves too saw himself in bears. However, it wasn't only for their 'shaggy and ungainly' physique, as Robert Lowell put it (here thinking of Roethke) (Hamilton, p. 335). Rather, Graves found an additional set of behavioural correspondences: a kind of headstrong, bearish territoriality writ as poetic discrimination. Both Graves and Roethke wrote poems about bears, and both poems concern territoriality and a virtuous yet stubborn dedication to their peculiar ways: Roethke's 'The Lady and the Bear' (from *I Am!*) and Graves's 'To Be Called a Bear' (from *Collected Poems, 1914-1947*)³¹. Graves's poem describes how bears 'gash the forest trees | To mark the bounds | Of their own hunting grounds' (p. 416) (Note the initial anapaest in 'Of their own hunting grounds': the accent falls on *own*, doubling down on the point.) This territoriality reminds me of Randall Jarrell's *The Bat-Poet* (1964),³² which features an incredibly territorial mockingbird who chases away the creatures it impersonates. Jarrell's bat-poet crafts a poem about the bird, concluding:

A mockingbird can sound like anything.
He imitates the world he drove away
So well that for a minute, in the moonlight,
Which one's the mockingbird? Which one's the world?

Just as Roethke and Graves saw themselves in bears, Jarrell saw something of himself in the mockingbird, and part of what he saw is the very poetic territoriality found in Graves's tree-gashing bears. Jarrell explains:

I've known a lot of artists and poets... and... I write poetry myself—or anyway, I write verse myself.... Several times when I've talked with writer friends about [*The Bat-Poet*] I'm amused to see how they immediately identify with the mockingbird. (Laugh) [...] Territoriality at its strongest is in

mockingbirds... (pause) So, it seemed to me that...’
mockingbirds are not only more like artists than other birds,
they’re more like people too.³³

Graves’s bears mark ‘their own hunting grounds’ as assiduously as the ‘Pee-culiar’ bear in Roethke’s ‘The Lady and the Bear’ defends his way of fishing:

A Lady came to a Bear by a Stream.
‘O why are you fishing that way?
Tell me, dear Bear there by the Stream,
Why are you fishing that way?’
‘I am what is known as a Biddly Bear, –
That’s why I’m fishing this way.
We Biddly’s are Pee-culiar Bears.
And so, – I’m fishing this way.

The lady is so shocked at the bear’s technique that she ‘slipped from the Bank’

And fell in the Stream still clutching a Plank,
But the Bear just sat there until she Sank;
As he went on fishing his way, his way,
As he went on fishing his way.

Robert Lowell often addressed his letters to Roethke ‘Dear bear’ (Hamilton, p. 335), so Roethke’s use of ‘dear bear there’ (doubtlessly encouraged by the triplet rhyme) clearly signals its biographical significance. The lady’s shock and the bear’s undaunted response provides insight into the singlemindedness of the practicing poet, even in the face of criticism (and evidence of Roethke’s fearlessness about treating death in his children’s poems, a fearlessness Graves shares, as we’ve seen). Robert Leydenfrost’s illustration depicts our Biddly Bear smiling at the reader; of the lady, all that remains are

two high-heeled legs jutting from the stream: unfazed by the lady's fatal spill, the bear carries on 'fishing his way, his way'.

Graves is also interested in pursuing his own mode of poetry in an equally 'Pee-culiar' way. After describing the bears' purposeful mauling of trees – whose knotty roots twist into the chthonic depths even as their branches stretch skyward – 'To Be Called a Bear' notes that:

They follow the wild bees
Point by point home
For love of honeycomb;
They browse on blueberries.

The speaker asks, 'should I stare | If I am called a bear', adding, 'And is it not the truth?' before characterising himself in a way that befits Roethke as well as Graves: modulating from the third person 'they' to the first person 'I', he writes, 'Unkempt and surly with a sweet tooth' (recall Lowell's characterisation of bears as 'shaggy and ungainly'), 'I tilt my muzzle toward the starry hub | Where Queen Callisto guards her cubs'.

The story of Callisto, as told in the *Katasterismoi* (often attributed to Eratosthenes of Kyrene, likely incorrectly), fairly hums with the interpenetration of the high and low, the celestial and the mundane, the eternal and the corporal. The nymph Callisto, who pledged herself to chastity in honour of Artemis the hunter, was raped by Zeus, and when her pregnancy was discovered, she was transformed by Artemis into a bear. Graves calls her 'Queen', for she was the daughter of Lykaon, king of Arcadia, and – in the form of a bear – she would eventually give birth to Arkas, who would himself be named king. But Callisto was brought low by Artemis, and in the form of a beast, she would be hunted almost to death by her own son. Zeus, moved by her plight, rescued her, placing her among the stars in the constellation Ursa Major (Condos, pp. 362–63).³⁴ But in the poem, our more quotidian bear stares upward at its estellated, divine image, placed there by Zeus, the heavenly constellation the result of the king of the gods' basest lusts, even

as our bear's earthly love of honeycomb and blueberries, his pursuit of bees ('Point by point') driven by a sweet tooth, leads it to more celestial contemplations: Ursa Major, its shape (point by point) implied by the stars. The lust of the bear is the bounty of God. Here we find another similarity between our two poets: their shared belief that our unkempt and surly exploration of the sublunary world unlocks the heavens, that a poetry of the small, made for children out of short lines and old meters, can reveal enduring truths. Graves's bearish sweet tooth for blueberries and honeycomb points his muzzle to the stars, a metaphor for the poetic process of meaning making, instructing us, as Joseph writes, 'to disregard nothing – [...] not even an apparently trite, didactic, cast-off children's rhyme – because anything may be transvalued by poetic truth'.³⁵ He continues, 'Poetic truth alone determines what has meaning and worth' (p. 88), a claim that holds true whether we speak of honeycomb or celestial constellation (for what are constellations if not the poetic imagination refiguring the cosmos?).

This is a rather Romantic impulse, one found also in Roethke, for the pair share a profound sympathy with Romanticism. In *Midcentury Quartet: Bishop, Lowell, Jarrell, Berryman, and the Making of a Postmodern Aesthetic* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1999), Thomas Travisano contrasts Roethke's Romantic impulses with his eponymous quartet. Of course, Travisano grants that they, too, were 'preoccupied with [...] the wonder and darkness of childhood', but he stresses that they nevertheless 'found Roethke's work significantly more romantic' than theirs (p. 17). Joseph locates a similar Romanticism in Graves's work – specifically in *The Penny Fiddle*, noting that it

taps into a tradition that goes back to the anti-Augustan, anti-materialist poets Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake, in whose works the social order is subverted to correlate poetry with material corruption and material corruption with transcendence. (*Orphans*, p. 14)

Indeed, both are particularly Blakean Romantics, summoning the binaries of innocence and experience only to deconstruct them, to fold them into one another even as they undermine the hierarchical thinking that tends to privilege one over the other. As Joseph writes (about ‘Allie’, the second poem in *Penny Fiddle*), ‘One might go so far as to argue that Graves wrote “Allie” as a sophisticated children’s poem, in a somewhat antiquated manner reminiscent of *Songs of Innocence*’.³⁶ He argues that ‘Graves is challenging Blake’s constructivist notion of a protected innocence’, that he uses the poem as an occasion to ‘reflect on his own ideas within an argument against Blake’s formulation of innocence and experience (p. 259). Still, Graves writes within the Romantic mode both to summon and to challenge Blake’s specific strain of Romantic thinking. In fact, Edward Hirsch’s introduction to Roethke’s *Selected Poems* (New York: Library of America, 2005) might easily apply to the Graves of *Penny Fiddle*. Hirsch proposes that Roethke ‘transformed himself into a major romantic poet’, that he ‘courted the irrational and embraced what is most vulnerable in life. “Those who are willing to be vulnerable move among mysteries,” he declared’ (p. xiii). Later, he asserts, ‘Roethke was an American poet of the regressive imagination’, specifically linking him to Graves: ‘He looked for guidance to the work of other modern poets who evoked the archaic to give their poems ritual power, such as W. B. Yeats, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence’ (pp. xx-xxi).

Like Graves, Roethke was also enamoured with the short line, the accentual rhythms of folk and nursery rhyme, finding their rhythms, coupled with the rustic voice of the Wordsworthian everyman, perfect for his twentieth century variety of Romanticism. Roethke writes:

The decasyllable line is fine for someone who wants to meditate—or moulder. Me, I need something to jump in: hence the spins and shifts, the songs, the rants and howls. The shorter line can still serve us: it did when English was young, and when we were children. (*On Poetry*, p. 93)

These qualities are evident in his children's poetry, as they are in Graves's. In his forward to *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*,³⁷ Graves implies his affection for the accentual, folk rhythms Roethke so admired by contending that 'Children unlearned in the social uses of poetry' have not had their 'natural sense of rhythm [...] destroyed by the metronome of school-room prosody' (p. iii). Of course, Theodore Roethke and Robert Graves aren't the only poets who find value in the nursery rhyme, folk poem, and their anonymous authors. In *Knock at a Star*, a popular anthology of children poetry, X. J. and Dorothy Kennedy aver, 'After Shakespeare, Anonymous may be the second best poet in our language. At least, he or she wrote more good poems than most poets who sign what they write'.³⁸ (Minus the bit about Shakespeare, this is position Graves believes children largely share, declaring, again in *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*, that children 'are not bothered by questions of authorship, date, or text' [p. iii].) In 'Mother Goose', Maurice Sendak spends ten pages extolling the rude virtues of anonymous folk poetry, but at one point he turns to his old collaborator, Robert Graves (Sendak illustrated his *Big Green Book*), to drive the point home: 'Robert Graves claims the best of the older [Mother Goose rhymes] are nearer to poetry than the greater part of *The Oxford Book of English Verse*'.³⁹ Graves ties together his appreciation of the folk tradition, the nursery rhyme, nonsense, its child audience, and the affinity he and Roethke share for Romanticism in *Poetic Unreason*, where he assures, 'Romanticism [...] has long been banished to the nursery', for 'the nursery is the one place where there is an audience not too sophisticated to appreciate ancient myths and so-called nonsense rhymes of greater or lesser antiquity'.⁴⁰

The Penny Fiddle begins with its title poem ('The Penny Fiddle'), and it operates, as first poems often do, as an articulation of the book's aesthetic sensibility. More, it dramatizes the poetic enterprise. It concerns itself not with the writing of any particular poem, but rather with how readers transform poems into poetry, a mystery that confounds adults (even literary critics) as often as it does children:

Yesterday I bought a penny fiddle
And put it to my chin to play,
But I found that the strings were painted,
So I threw my fiddle away.

The poem's eponymous fiddle is a small thing, a cheap thing (I recall Charles Bernstein once saying that poetry is the rare kind of text that devalues the paper on which it's printed: a leaf of paper has *some* value, but print a poem on it and it's ruined). So, is the fiddle a metaphor for poetry? In a way. As Joseph explains in 'Poetic Nonsense: Robert Graves, The White Goddess and Children's Poetry', the 'poem enacts a transvaluation in which the materially worthless thing is also, simultaneously, the sacred. Like the penny fiddle, a children's poem can be both the medium of true, ethereal music and still only a toy'⁴¹ (p. 667). It is, Joseph later clarifies, 'the materially valueless thing from which absolute value flows' (p. 675). However, it is only of value in the right hands: the poem becomes poetry when it meets a reader, one with a poetic predisposition. This fact is dramatized when 'A gipsy girl found my penny fiddle | As it lay abandoned there'; she asks, 'if she might keep it', and immediately:

Drew such music from the fiddle
With the help of a farthing bow,
That I offered five shillings for the secret.
But, alas, she would not let it go.

The poetry, really, lies in the music made *using* the fiddle, the experience that comes from reading a poem well. Unread, a poem is nothing. Or nothing more than a penny fiddle gathering dust in an old shop. However, reading alone does not transform it into something of value. The boy looks it over, is turned off by its painted strings, never seeks to draw music from them with its bow. It takes more than reading a poem to make it poetry: one must read it well.

In *Poetic Unreason*, Graves articulates what, to him, makes for a good reader of poetry, one like our gypsy girl. In this passage, he argues that ‘a well-chosen anthology should be [like] a medicine chest’, but he insists that ‘no medicine and no poetry can ever be effective without the consent and co-operation of the patient’ (p. 2). The poem cannot do all the work: it needs a sympathetic reader. As early as 1916, we have indications that this is Graves’s view of poetry. In “‘Allie’ and the Lost War”, Joseph points to a letter Graves wrote to Edward Marsh in which he writes, ‘I’ve been reading [Walter de la Mare’s] *Peacock Pie* again and it improves every time’. The text is unchanged, but what Graves brings to it has. Joseph reads Graves to be implying, ‘*Peacock Pie* isn’t terrible, once one begins to read one’s own meanings into it’ (*Allie*, p. 254). *Peacock Pie*, like the penny fiddle, becomes something more thanks to Graves’s farthing bow, his open and generative manner of reading that *makes* meaning more than *finds* it.

Roethke’s *I Am!* opens with nonsense, poems designed to be read in the sympathetic gypsy girl way. Nonsense, as Michael Heyman explains, is a variety of poetry ‘that deals with indeterminacy and multiplicity of meaning’,⁴² for, he continues a bit later, ‘The genre of nonsense operates primarily by simultaneously transmitting meaning(s) and lack of meaning’ (p. 190). He points us to Wim Tigges’s characterisation of the nonsense genre, one in which ‘the seeming presence of one or more “sensible” meanings is kept in balance by a simultaneous absence of such a meaning’.⁴³ Consider, then, the opening to ‘Dirty Dinky’, another poem in the ‘Nonsense’ section of *I Am!*:

It’s windy there, and rather weird,
And when you think the sky has cleared
– Why, there is Dirty Dinky.

Dinky serves as a kind of personification of the poetic sensibility as exemplified by nonsense: we delight in the strange idea of ‘weather’ inside a beard, be it windy or not, but when we ‘think the sky has cleared’, we realise that we’ve only *thought* it so: there

is Dirty Dinky! The sky hasn't cleared (or maybe it has); it depends on how we *think*. Yet no matter, Dinky is there whether we think we've cleared things up, made things mean, or not. This would seem to contradict Graves and his music-summoning gypsy girl: the poem's meaning is forever deferred, the poetry a nut we can't quite crack no matter the things we've *thunk*. Yet in nonsense 'more "sensible" meanings [are] kept in balance by a simultaneous absence of such meaning', as Tigges has it. Besides, there is more to this story, for the poem concludes,

You'd better watch the things you do,
You'd better watch the things you do.
You're part of him; he's part of you
– *You may be Dirty Dinky*

The bets are still hedged (we only *may* be Dirty Dinky, even as we're part of him and he of us), yet the possibility is there. We might very well be the narrator of 'The Penny Fiddle', ready to cast away a piece of verse (or penny fiddle) because it's cheap, its strings painted and practically worthless – or we might be the gipsy girl who takes the poem to chin and draws our farthing bow across those weird, painted strings, coaxing poetry from it. We may find that it isn't so terrible once one begins to read one's own meanings into it.

Graves makes clear his affinity for nonsense in *Poetic Unreason*, not only where he remarks that nonsense has found its way to children likely because 'the nursery is the one place where there is an audience not too sophisticated to appreciate ancient myths and so-called nonsense rhymes of greater or lesser antiquity' (p. 126), but also in his generous appraisal of Edward Lear, particularly his 'Dong with a Luminous Nose'. Graves insists that 'though there may not be found a Classical Scholar to admit it', the poem's protagonist is 'essentially as tragic a figure as Cadmus of the Greek legend seeking his lost Europa, even a more painful one' (p. 24). Continuing, he notes that it is 'strange that Lear is treated less seriously' than other great poets, asking, 'who will say that the foolery in Edward Lear is less worthy of our tragic imagination

than the terrible foolery at the crisis of King Lear'? (p. 24). One wonders what he would have made of Roethke's 'Dirty Dinky', the meanings he might have made with 'The Monotony Song', also in *I Am!* Which begins,

A donkey's tail is very nice
You mustn't pull it more than twice,
Now that's a piece of good advice
– Heigho, meet Hugh and Harry!

Here is another poem about death (and life – and the things we do between the two). Advice on how much one can safely irritate a donkey doesn't apply when Hugh meets an otherwise gracious, talking bear. Hugh is quickly dispatched by said bear for calling attention to its tendency to shed: 'Old Boy, you're shedding hair, | And shedding more than here and there'. Our Bearish Roethke was no fan of critics, and neither is his poetic bear, who responds civilly at first, but eventually breaks the poem's form (or at least bends it) by substituting a 'Grrrr'! for a rhyming 'fur'. (Neither rhyme exactly with *far* or *are*, but *Grrrr* rhymes with the missing *fur*, whose absence echoes the soon-to-be-absent *Hugh*, leaving us, as we'll see, with nothing but *Harry* and the hair of our hairy bear, who doesn't shed both here and there but somehow sheds *more than* here *and* there: nonsense!) Which is to say, the bear mauls poor Hugh into the next world:

Sir, you go too far,
I wonder who you think you are
To make remarks about my—Grrrr!
– And there was only Harry!

Harry himself is soon to die. At first it seems he dies from running up a wall that – like Hugh, like the word *fur* – isn't there (or here):

This Harry ran straight up a wall,
But found he wasn't there at all,

And so he had a horrid fall.
– Alas, alack for Harry!

But the line doesn't read, 'But found *it* wasn't there at all'. Instead, Harry has a fall because *he* wasn't there. Is the antecedent of the 'he' an anthropomorphised, oddly male wall? (It could be – an earlier piece in 'Nonsense Poems' anthropomorphises a ceiling, after all.) But perhaps not. Or perhaps Harry was gone before he arrived. Or maybe Harry simply wasn't where the wall was (despite the first line in the stanza insisting that he ran straight up one). The meaning is summoned even as it slips away, much like the wall, like the word *fur*, like both Hugh and Harry. The nonsense moral is simple, if rather dark, and couched in uncertainty (*I guess, sometimes, unless*):

The moral is, I guess you keep
Yourself awake until you sleep,
And sometimes look before you leap
– Unless you're Hugh or Harry!

We're taken back to 'Dinky', or at least I am, for I find myself chanting and dancing in that ursine, Roethkeish way: 'you'd better watch the things you do; you're part of them; they're part of you – *you* may be Hugh or Harry'.

Throughout *The Penny Fiddle*, poetry and song and the transformative power of both is evident. With 'Dicky', for instance, Graves offers a gloomy ghost story cast as a loose ballad. The rhyme scheme varies – sometimes *abcb*, other times *abab* – as does the meter, but with that variation comes its folksy feel, the sense it is an old country song rudely made for those who, as Graves writes, have not had their 'natural sense of rhythm [...] destroyed by the metronome of school-room prosody' (*The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*, p. iii). Our eponymous hero encounters a ghost with a 'lean, lolling jaw', wearing

Garments old and musty,
Of antique cut,
His body very frail and bony,
His eyes tight shut.

What is crucial, however, is how this strange creature ('His face was clay [...] | His beard, cobwebs') comes to be. Yes, he's a product of language, summoned by the very poem we read, but within the world of the poem he is also made by poetry, or, again, summoned by it, his appearance prefaced by Dicky playing childhood games ('Twirling my stick') while he sings 'old country songs'. The ghost materialises in the very next stanza. Likewise, 'Lift-Boy' begins, 'Let me tell you a story of how I began', foregrounding the fact that this tale is a performance made of language (and one that, like Graves's medicine chest in *Poetic Unreason*, depends upon 'the consent and co-operation of the patient' [p. 2]: *let me tell you a story*). The poem 'What Did I Dream' speaks of 'The finest entertainment known': dreams – if only the waking mind can somehow recapture them, keep 'The fragments' from 'fly[ing] like chaff', if only we can capture them, say, in verse. In 'Jock o'Binnorie' we meet a king's 'fool called Leery', who tells 'nine hundred tales | And found no others to tell', yet when he 'started from the first once more', the king 'knew it well'. Was his highness angry? No, for:

'Old friends are best, dear Fool', he cried,
'And old yarns heard again.
You may tell me the story of Jock o' Binnorie
Every night of my reign!'

These old yarns belong in the storehouse of traditional folktales: 'old friends' Graves knew and loved, whether cast in verse or prose. And, of course, there's 'Allie'. Joseph has given us an entire essay on this four-stanza, thirty-six-line poem: "Allie" and the Lost War', to which I've earlier referred. 'At first glance', he proposes, 'Allie' is a children's poem; it 'seems unambiguously an ode to lost

childhood, and a variation on the ancient theme Northrop Frye calls the “Framework of all literature” (p. 252): ‘how man once lived in a Golden Age, [...] how that world was lost, and how we someday may be able to get it back again’.⁴⁴ However, Joseph recommends, take a closer, second look at the poem, published in *Country Sentiment* (1920) only two years after the close of World War I, and it transforms into a war poem, or rather, he contends cheekily, it becomes ‘a poem that is and is not a war poem, and is and is not a children’s poem’ (p. 264). I advise a third look (or maybe squint your eyes and give it a first look yet again), for read here, not at the close of WWI but at the end of this essay; read here, not only in the context of Graves’s work, but alongside Roethke’s *I Am!*; read here, not in *Country Sentiment* but set in the pages of *The Penny Fiddle* (subtitled: *Poems for Children*) where it immediately follows the *ars poetica* that is its title poem; read here with a touch of joyous foolery and so-called nonsense, and Allie’s call becomes a spell inside a children’s poem:

Allie, call the birds in,
The birds from the sky.
Allie calls, Allie sings
[...]

Allie, call the beasts in,
The beasts, every one.
Allie calls, Allie sings
[...]

Allie, call the fish up,
The fish from the stream.
Allie calls, Allie sings
[...]

Allie, call the children,
Children from the green.
Allie calls, Allie sings.

Here we have another poem about poetry. Allie does not make music with a penny fiddle, but draws it from within herself. Allie calls. Allie sings. Remember the gypsy girl: there, the poetry was the music she coaxed from the fiddle. Allie's poetry, too, is the music she draws from her instrument, but in this case the instrument is her own body. Furthermore, the music is tied to language. A young Orpheus, Allie makes poetry, and that poetry reorders the world. This is an obvious point with which to end, so I may as well compound it with the coincidence that *The Penny Fiddle* precedes Roethke's *I Am!* by only a year. If one were inclined to read one's own meanings into that coincidence, one could argue that *The Penny Fiddle* performs the overture to *I Am!* More, one could decide that Allie sings Roethke's *I Am!* into being. In her poem, Allie conjures the menagerie of creatures that populate both Roethke's nonsense and greenhouse poems, and she does so by name: both share lambs, cows, minnows, and eels, and while no trout or goldfish, nor doves, hens, or robins appear in Roethke's book, the more generic fish and bird certainly do. And among Roethke's nonsense poems we even find 'A Boy who had Gumption and Push | [who] Would frequently Talk to a Bush'. I mention Roethke's Boy only because he's a curious, Roethkeish version of Allie. Unlike Allie, who 'call[s] the beasts in, | The beasts, every one', our Boy communes with the vegetative world, no animals, but a bush and a bush alone; still,

Nobody Sniggered and Mocked
As Those Two quietly Talked,
Because Nobody Heard,
Not a Beast, Not a Bird, –
So they Talked and they Talked and they Talked.

Again, this is joyous foolery and nonsense. Like Graves and Roethke, however, I mean it seriously. Like Allie, I fashioned this essay as a call, as an occasion to summon Roethke and Graves from their rest, to place them on a nice beach in Mallorca and watch them 'play by the water's edge | Till the April sun set', to imagine

what we might hear should we listen in on them as they (like the Boy and the bush) Talk and they Talk and they Talk. We can never know, of course, what Graves would think of *I Am!*, the meanings he might make of it. And Roethke, too, has left us without commentary on *The Penny Fiddle*. However, we owe it to both Graves and Roethke, who spent so much of their lives bearishly devoted to thinking and thinking hard about nonsense, nursery rhymes, and children's poetry, to attend to theirs. If we can't overhear them talking, perhaps we should, like a kinder Zeus, place their collections in the night sky alongside the other fine books that form, point by point, the constellations of their poetic output.⁴⁵ Then, when we tilt our muzzles to the heavens and transform the starry field of their work into an image, every star will be accounted for. *The Penny Fiddle* and *I Am! Says the Lamb* may never be their constellations' brightest stars, but they are central, nonetheless. The images we make without them are less interesting for their absence, hobbled by incompleteness. So, fix them in the firmament, step back, and take a look. Then tell us what you see.

Joseph T. Thomas, Jr. is a poet and scholar of American poetry and children's literature. He directs the National Center for the Study of Children's Literature at San Diego State University. Thomas has published numerous essays and two books, *Poetry's Playground* (Wayne State UP, 2007) and *Strong Measures* (Make Now, 2007). He can be found on Twitter @josephsdsu.

NOTES

¹ Robert Graves, *The Penny Fiddle* (London: Cassell, 1960).

² Theodore Roethke, *I Am! Says the Lamb: A Joyous Book of Sense and Nonsense* (New York: Doubleday, 1961)

³ Unlike Graves, who in *The Penny Fiddle* sat poems he had written for adults beside those he had written for children, Roethke divided *I Am! Says the Lamb* into two sections: the first, 'The Nonsense Poems' (with twenty-two poems), consisted of poems written with a child audience in mind, and the second, 'The Greenhouse Poems' (with twenty), comprised

poems originally published in collections for adults. ‘The Heron’, ‘The Bat’, and ‘Vernal Sentiment’, for instance, originally appeared in *Open House* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1941). The heart of ‘The Greenhouse Poems’ comes from *The Lost Son and Other Poems* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948), where fifteen pieces first appeared: ‘My Papa’s Waltz’, his two ‘Cuttings’ poems, ‘Root Cellar’, ‘Forcing House’, ‘Weed Puller’, ‘Orchids’, ‘Moss-Gathering’, ‘Big Wind’, ‘Old Florist’, ‘Frau Bauman, Frau Schmidt, and Frau Schwartze’, ‘Transplanting’, ‘Child on Top of a Greenhouse’, ‘Flower Dump’, and ‘Carnations’. The most recent poem in the section (‘Snake’) was taken from *Words for the Wind* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958). In an essay he prepared for the *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* (London), Roethke comments on the children’s poems represented in *Words for the Wind*, explaining:

Then by way of contrast [to the love poems early in the collection], there is a handful of light pieces and poems for children. These are rougher than what most children’s editors prefer. The attempt – part of a larger effort – was to make poems which please both child and parent, without insulting the intelligence or taste of either.

Theodore Roethke, ‘Theodore Roethke Writes’, in *On Poetry and Craft: Selected Prose of Theodore Roethke* (New York: Copper Canyon, 2001), p. 32.

The majority of ‘The Nonsense Poems’ are original to *I Am! Says the Lamb*. Those seventeen poems represent the book in *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (New York: Doubleday, 1966). The rest in the section are sourced from *Words for the Wind*, which contains the interlude Roethke points to above. Titled ‘Lighter Pieces and Poems for Children’, it includes ‘Dinky’, ‘The Cow’, ‘The Serpent’, ‘The Sloth’, and ‘The Lady and the Bear’.

⁴ See Robert Graves, *The Complete Poems of Robert Graves*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward, 3 vols (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995-1999).

⁵ Allan Seager, *The Glass House: The Life of Theodore Roethke* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), pp. 251-52.

⁶ Wolfgang Saxon, ‘Robert Graves, Poet and Scholar, Dies at 90’, *New York Times*, 8 December 1985, section 1, pp. 1, 48 (p. 1).

⁷ Joshua Hammer, ‘Robert Graves Found “Perfect Tranquillity” in Majorca’, *The New York Times*, 3 July 2015 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/travel/robert-graves-found-perfect-tranquillity-in-majorca.html>> [Accessed 7 April 2021]

⁸ Theodore Roethke, *Words for the Wind: The Collected Verse* (New York Doubleday, 1958).

⁹ Theodore Roethke, *Selected Letters*, ed. by Ralph J. Mills, Jr. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), p. 218.

¹⁰ Roethke, ‘How to Write like Somebody Else’, in *On Poetry and Craft*, p. 55.

¹¹ Roethke’s definition here is likely a quotation from Auden, who in the introduction to *The Poet’s Tongue: An Anthology, Chosen by W. H. Auden and John Garrett* (London: Bell, 1935), writes, ‘Of the many definitions of poetry, the simplest is still the best: ‘memorable speech’’ (p. 5). Thanks to Neil Philip for reminding me of this fact, and for pointing out that although both Auden and Garrett signed the introduction, Edward Mendelson reprints it as by Auden alone in *The English Auden* (where the quotation can be found on p. 327).

¹² Roethke, *Selected Letters*, p. 242.

¹³ Seager, p. 245. For more on Roethke’s views on teaching (and, specifically, the teaching of poetry), check out ‘The Teaching Poet’, a short pedagogical essay Roethke prepared for *Poetry*, 79.5 (1952), pp. 250-55 magazine. It was published in 1952, nine years before *I Am!* For more on ‘The Teaching Poet’ and Roethke’s pedagogy, see my ‘A Few Thousand Words on Theodore Roethke, Children’s Poetry, and Three Poems Concerning Two Turtles (one of Whom Is Named Myrtle)’ in *A Field Guide to the Poetry of Theodore Roethke*, ed. by William Barillas (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 2020), pp. 213-21.

¹⁴ Theodore Roethke, *The Waking: Poems 1933-1953* (New York: Doubleday, 1953).

¹⁵ Robert Graves, *The Big Green Book* (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1962). Coincidentally, Untermeyer was one half of the committee that awarded Theodore Roethke the Pulitzer in 1954 (Alfred Kreymborg was the other).

¹⁶ Lissa Paul, ‘Literacy’, in *Keywords for Children’s Literature*, ed. by Lissa Paul and Philip Nel (New York: NYU Press, 2011), p. 144.

¹⁷ Michael Joseph, ‘“Orphans of Poetry”: The Poetry of Childhood and the Poetry for Children of Robert Graves’, *Book 2.0.*, 6 (2016), p. 10.

¹⁸ My own interest in Graves’s children’s poetry was inspired by Joseph’s 2017 Visiting Scholar’s Lecture at San Diego State University, ‘How to

Do Things with Poems’, an hour lecture analysing Robert Graves’s ‘The Magical Picture’ and ‘Hide and Seek’ (the former written when Graves was 26, the latter when he was 73).

¹⁹ Michael Joseph, ‘*The Penny Fiddle* and Poetic Truth: The Children’s Poems of Robert Graves’, in *Poetry and Childhood*, ed. by Morag Styles, Louise Joy, David Whitley (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2010), pp. 81-89.

²⁰ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Robert Graves: From Great War Poet to Good-Bye to All That 1895-1929* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). The quotation here – Graves writing to Edmund Gosse on 25 March 1917 – refers to the early sixteenth-century poet John Skelton. Wilson notes that Graves ‘had enjoyed his ‘peculiar quality of joyous foolery”’, a quality, she adds, ‘that he had also recognized in English nursery rhymes’ (p. 186).

²¹ Robert Graves, *Country Sentiment* (London: Heinemann, 1920).

²² Robert Graves, ‘A First Review’, *The Complete Poems in One Volume*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 100.

²³ Interestingly, Wilson does mention Graves’s desire to have some of his ballads and nursery rhymes set to music, explaining that the project ‘petered out’ when Welsh composer ‘[Ivor] Novello lost interest’. The project was called *The Penny Fiddle*, and, she adds, it ‘would not be published until 1960’ (p. 224). Given how their marriage turned out, it seems nursery rhymes were much more than a ‘private world’ he shared with Nicholson, that his interest in them was a sustained preoccupation and Wilson’s claim that ‘it was to please [Nicholson], by supplying her with texts for illustration, that he had focused more on “nursery stuff” is an oversimplification (p. 244).

²⁴ *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, ed. by Alfred Bendixen and Stephanie Burt (New York Cambridge University Press, 2015). My contribution to the volume, ‘Modern and Contemporary Children’s Poetry’ discusses Roethke’s work as a children’s poet, covering (albeit briefly) *I Am! Says the Lamb* (1961), *Party at the Zoo* (1963), and his lone posthumous collection of children’s poetry, *Dirty Dinky and Other Creatures* (1973) chapter that substantially treats him and his work, Roethke shares the spotlight: David Wojahn’s “All the Blessings of this Consuming Chance”: Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Theodore Roethke, and the Middle-Generation Poets’.

²⁵ *A Field Guide to the Poetry of Theodore Roethke*, ed. by William David Barillas and Edward Hirsch (Athens, OH: Swallow Press / Ohio University Press, 2021).

²⁶ Roethke, *Complete Poems*. As a result, neither *Party at the Zoo* (New York: Crowell-Collier, 1963) nor *Dirty Dinky and Other Creatures* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1973) have sections devoted to them in *A Field Guide*. However, none of the other contributors occasion to mention either book and (I regret to say) even I fail to mention both (although I did follow protocol by corralling my single reference to *Zoo* within an endnote. My essay is the sole piece exploring the poems in *I Am!* and is called ‘A Few Thousand Words on Theodore Roethke, Children’s Poetry, and Three Poems Concerning Two Turtles (One of Whom Is Named Myrtle)’, pp. 213-21.

²⁷ For those inclined to read that work, check out Joseph T. Thomas Jr., ‘Street Cries’, in *Poetry’s Playground: The Culture of Contemporary American Children’s Poetry* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007), pp. 61-84, where Roethke shares the spotlight with another poet whose children’s poetry is largely neglected: John Ciardi.

²⁸ Randall Jarrell, ‘Fifty Years of American Poetry’, in *The Third Book of Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 326.

²⁹ Ian Hamilton, *Robert Lowell: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1982), p. 335.

³⁰ Hamilton adds:

When [Lowell] first met Roethke, Lowell was full of his own bear jokes and thought it delightful that there should be a bear-poet more shaggy and ungainly than himself. For a period he addressed Roethke in letters as ‘Dear Bear’. (p. 335)

³¹ Robert Graves, *Collected Poems 1914-1947* (London: Cassell, 1947).

³² Randall Jarrell, *The Bat-Poet* (New York: HarperCollins, 1964).

³³ Jerome Griswold, *The Children’s Books of Randall Jarrell* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), pp. 57-58.

³⁴ Theony Condos, ‘The Katasterismoi (Part 1)’, *Astronomical Society of the Pacific Leaflets*, 10 (1970), 362-63.

³⁵ Joseph, ‘*The Penny Fiddle* and Poetic Truth: The Children’s Poems of Robert Graves’, p. 88.

³⁶ Michael Joseph, “Allie” and the Lost War’, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 41 (2017), 250-268, p. 259.

³⁷ Robert Graves, *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes* (London: Benn, 1927).

³⁸ Knock at a Star: A Child's Introduction to Poetry, ed. by X. J. Kennedy, Dorothy M. Kennedy, Karen Lee Baker (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 6.

³⁹ Maurice Sendak, 'Mother Goose', in *Caldecott & Co.: Notes on Books and Pictures* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988), p. 13. Here Sendak is quoting him word for word, despite the indication that he's paraphrasing. Graves writes, 'the best of the older ones are nearer to poetry than the greater part of the "Oxford Book of English Verse"' (p. iii).

⁴⁰ Robert Graves, *Poetic Unreason* (London: Palmer, 1925), p. 126.

⁴¹ Michael Joseph, 'Poetic Nonsense: Robert Graves, The White Goddess and Children's Poetry', *Gravesiana: The Journal of the Robert Graves Society*, 3 (2013), 667.

⁴² Michael Heyman, 'A New Defense of Nonsense; or, Where Then Is his Phallus? and Other Questions Not to Ask', *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, 24 (1999), 188.

⁴³ Wim Tigges, *An Anatomy of Literary Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), pp. 255-56.

⁴⁴ Joseph quotes Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1964), p. 20.

⁴⁵ Indeed, perhaps it's time to create a collection of all Roethke's children's poems, time for a compilation of Graves's children's poetry to join those of his war poems and love poems.

Never-Begotten Perfect Daughters: Laura Riding and Mina Loy's Steinian Inheritances

Eva Isherwood-Wallace

Abstract: This paper argues that Gertrude Stein acts as a significant point of connection between poets Laura Riding and Mina Loy. Their critical responses to Gertrude Stein's work display similar praise of its newness and immediacy, whereby language is 'cleansed' of historical experience. This shared conception of Stein's anti-historical poetics complements their engagement with traditional influence in their own poetry, through which they both prioritise the new in a Steinian notion of a 'pure' language. The identification of this link illuminates the symmetrical preoccupations of their poetic careers, making it possible to situate Laura Riding in a network of her female contemporaries.

Keywords: Laura Riding, Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, poetics, modernism

Though most widely known through their thirteen-year partnership, Laura Riding was frustrated by her marginalisation in comparison to Robert Graves. In their foreword to *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928), they 'take a statistical pleasure' in exposing the 'vulgarity' of reviewers who had incorrectly listed Graves as the sole author of *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) – a mistake they attribute to Riding's gender and Graves's more recognisable name.¹ This desire to correct misreading and misunderstanding persisted throughout Riding's career and is apparent in her editorial decisions. Riding's revisions and reordering of her work in her final *Collected Poems* (1938) obscure the chronology and contexts of its formation, placing her poetry outside of time and contemporaneity

– thereby rendering it, and her identity as a poet, something closer to pure, analytic truth than to a historically locatable (and therefore conditional) life’s work.² Riding allows the date of publication no influence in determining the order of the collection. This avoidance of chronology, coupled with her infamous resistance to anthologisation (particularly as a ‘woman poet’³) complicates any attempt to position her in relation to her female contemporaries. This refusal to be categorised, bolstered by the limitations she imposed on the republication of her poetry in anthologies following her declaration of its failure,⁴ has limited the reading and reception of her work. There has been little critical discussion of Riding’s affinities with other female modernists. However, while recognising this complication, reading Riding’s poetry alongside that of her peers does much to contextualise this poet who so often seems outside of time. Here, this contextualisation takes the form of considering Riding alongside another once-neglected female poet: Mina Loy. Primarily, their shared interest in Gertrude Stein illuminates interrelations between Riding and Loy themselves and expands our understanding of their own thematic concerns.

Riding’s and Loy’s praise of Stein’s newness and immediacy, which they jointly conceive of in terms of purity untainted by historical inheritance, makes it possible to read their own investments in ‘cleansing’ poetic language of its literary inheritances in tandem. This link between Riding and Loy, with their shared conception of Stein’s anti-historical poetics acting as a point of relation, exemplifies their shared pursuit of a ‘pure’ language. Beyond this first point of relation, this situating of Riding and Loy as a pair opens up further points of overlap between their poetic lives and languages. The most significant years of Loy’s poetry career coincided with the publication of Riding’s first books. Loy’s biographer Carolyn Burke comments that during ‘the 1920s she was as well-known as Marianne Moore’.⁵ Her first volume of poetry, *Lunar Baedeker*, was published in 1923 (p. 321), with Riding’s first collection, *The Close Chaplet*, appearing three years later from The Hogarth Press.⁶ Riding, whose father was a Polish-Jewish immigrant to America and whose mother was the daughter

of German-Jewish immigrants,⁷ ‘grew up in a household where English was not the only native tongue’ and so ‘[h]er earliest experiences of language were multiple and inflected, yet early on poetry may have seemed a way to a purer language “where the fear of speaking in strange ways could be left behind”’.⁸ Loy’s background has much in common with Riding’s: her mother was English and Christian and her father was a Hungarian-Jewish immigrant to England (*Becoming Modern*, pp. 15-19). Being fluent in multiple languages, Loy claimed to have no understanding of ‘what pure English is’.⁹ Instead of striving for perfect English, she tried to achieve ‘pure language’. Riding and Loy both identified this sense of ‘pure’ language in Stein, regarding her often non-sensical poetry as resistant to traditional associations and grammatical form. Their own poetry responds to Stein’s approaches, grappling with this ‘new’ and ‘pure’ language as a tool against the legacy of historical influence.

In her article ‘The New Barbarism and Gertrude Stein’, published in a 1927 issue of *transition* and reproduced in the concluding chapter of the *Survey*, Riding offered her critical appraisal of Stein’s work: it is ‘primitive’, her words ‘are bare, immobile, mathematically placed, abstract’.¹⁰ In order to achieve what she terms ‘scientific barbarism’ poetry would need to be made more ‘sculptural or pictorial’ (pp. 273-74). The materials of visual art forms are able to resist the associative inheritances of their previous uses: ‘neither colour nor stone had been intrinsically affected by the romantic works in which they had been used’. In order to achieve a similar purification, language had to be

used as if afresh, cleansed of its experience: to be as ‘pure’ and ‘abstract’ as colour or stone. Words had to be reduced to their least historical value; the purer they could be made, the more eternally immediate and present they would be; they could express the absolute at the same time as they expressed the age. Or this was at any rate the logical effect of scientific barbarism if taken literally. (p. 274)

The difficulty of this shift demonstrates what Riding considers the ‘fallacy’ of comparing the linguistic and visual arts. However, she perceived the unique achievement of this barbaric language in Stein’s work: ‘Gertrude Stein is perhaps the only artisan of language who has ever succeeded in practising scientific barbarism literally’. In Stein, Riding saw a scientific mind which succeeded ‘by purging [language] completely of its false experiences’ (p. 281). Stein’s words are new, without history, of the present moment: ‘no older than the use she makes of them’. The ‘purer’ that words ‘could be made, the more eternally immediate and present they would be’ (p. 274).

The importance of Stein to Riding’s own work is evident. When Riding moved to England in 1926, she met modernist figures including T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Virginia Woolf.¹¹ The Seizin Press (run by Riding and Graves) also published Stein’s work in 1929,¹² and Riding’s interest in Stein’s work affected her own writing. As Jane Marcus notes, Riding ‘tried to purge poetry of metaphor, symbol and myth’ to achieve a purity of language informed by her affinity with Stein; Riding’s ‘kinship with Stein is clear’ (p. 298). In the view of Emily Stipes Watts, Riding is Stein’s ‘most direct literary descendant’.¹³ Furthermore, Riding became an advocate for her work, being ‘one of the few writers and critics in the 1920s publicly and vehemently to defend Stein and then to adopt certain of her poetic techniques and attitudes’ (p. 168).

The Riding-Stein affinity is echoed in criticism of Stein and Loy. Sara Crangle acknowledges the aesthetic similarities of Stein and Loy,¹⁴ while Burke calls Loy an ‘early and sympathetic critic’ of Stein.¹⁵ It is clear from Stein’s writings that she too recognised Loy’s sympathies. Loy frequented her 1905 salon, and their friendship became ‘lifelong’.¹⁶ Stein comments that Loy and her then-husband Stephen Haweis had been ‘among the very earliest to be interested’ in her work;¹⁷ and in recounting a visit paid to her and Toklas by Loy and Haweis, she acknowledges Loy’s particular ability to understand her:

[Haweis] did however plead for commas. Gertrude Stein said commas were unnecessary, the sense should be intrinsic and not have to be explained by commas [...] Mina Loy equally interested was able to understand without the commas. She has always been able to understand. (pp. 144-45)

Despite the extent to which their creative lives operated within similar networks, Riding and Loy (as far as can be seen) make no explicit reference to each other in their writings. Neither appears to mention the other in their published letters; neither Deborah Baker nor Carolyn Burke, their respective biographers, makes note of any connection. However, links between Riding and Loy have (to a limited extent) been identified by various critics. In a 1981 interview, Kenneth Rexroth named them ‘the two long-lost major writers of the heroic age of American modernism’.¹⁸ In his view, ‘both are utterly original, and both are capable of the most profound thought’. Marjorie Perloff quotes a 1997 edition of *Publishers Weekly*, which described Loy as a ‘forerunner’ to Riding and questioned whether Riding was in fact the superior poet.¹⁹ In an essay for *Circle*, Rexroth does not place Loy within the received canon of American modernists but instead associates her with the international avant-garde, whose representatives include Stein, Arensberg, Riding, and Eugene Jolas (as noted by Virginia M. Kouidis).²⁰ In recognising Stein’s ‘paratactic modernism’, Burke mentions Loy and Riding in a list of ‘women writers whose work has not always seemed to conform to modernist tradition’, acknowledging that such a tradition has been largely based on work by men.²¹

Just as Riding applauded the ‘sterilization of words’ (*Survey*, p. 287), by which Stein purifies language of past influence to enable ‘[expression] of the absolute’ (p. 274), Loy, in an almost identical manner, constructed an image of Stein as a scientist. In Loy’s poem ‘Gertrude Stein’, we see Stein at work in her ‘laboratory’, applying the same process of purification:

Curie
of the laboratory
of vocabulary
she crushed
the tonnage
of consciousness
congealed to phrases
to extract
a radium of the word²²

Riding's critical approach to Stein's barbarism comes to the same conclusions reached by Loy in this poem, published across the September and October issues of the *transatlantic review* (1924). This publication date means that Loy's poem was written at least three years prior to the publication of Riding and Graves' *Survey*. Whether Riding encountered Loy's poem is not known. Nonetheless, the affinities in their readings of Stein are revealing. In an accompanying letter,²³ Loy said of Stein:

It is the variety of her mental processes that gives such fresh significance to her words, as if she had got them out of bed early in the morning and washed them in the sun. They make a new appeal to us after the friction of an uncompromised [sic] intellect has scrubbed the meshed messes of traditional associations off them. ('Gertrude Stein', p. 307)

The rest of Loy's essay exhibits further evidence of this shared critical approach. Loy compares Stein's work to the 'primitive', echoing Riding's use of 'barbarism' (*Survey*, pp. 280, 306). Like Riding, Loy recognises the materiality of Stein's language and similarly associates it with the sculptural:

For Gertrude Stein obtains the 'belle matière' of her unsheathing of the fundamental with a most dexterous discretion in the placement and replacement of her phrases, of inversion of the same phrase sequences that are as closely

matched in level, as the fractional tones in primitive music or the imperceptible modelling of early Egyptian sculpture. ('Gertrude Stein', p. 306)

Loy's poem unfolds with an assured carefulness. Steady, short lines convey a sense of focus and deliberation; Loy chooses her words like solutions added to a test tube. This tone of considered experimentation is further suggested by the slight indentation of 'she crushed' and 'to extract' (p. 305). This spatial hesitation before each verb embodies the meticulous nature of laboratory work, collapsing distinctions between poem and action. Rhyme, consonance, assonance and alliteration ('laboratory', 'vocabulary', 'tonnage', 'she crushed', 'consciousness', 'congealed') build like the congealed layers described, from which the essential 'radium of the word' may be extracted. These sound textures of 'c' and 'sh' generate tactile physicality by requiring full use of teeth and throat; the words are physicalised, just as they are made subjects of physical science. The moment of extraction is marked by newness: the action is indented, and the phrase is sonically discontinuous with those before. In a poem of repeated sounds, these final lines are the only ones containing uniquely used letters: 'x', 'm' and 'w'. By identifying Stein with Marie Curie, Loy positions her as a female founding-figure of an ameliorative scientific field. Loy identifies 'Curie' only by her surname and awards it singular status as the first line of the poem. She draws upon the word's various associations before highlighting how Stein succeeds in '[scrubbing] the meshed messes of traditional associations off' her words (p. 307). 'Curie' brings to mind 'cure', from the Latin 'cūrāre' meaning 'to care for', from which 'curator' is derived (*OED*). For Loy, Stein is not only a scientist but a medical researcher, discovering new 'cures' for poetry. More than providing a salve, her actions are salvific: Stein 'crushed | the tonnage | of consciousness' to extract an otherwise unrevealed essence. This essential element of language is identified with the luminescent; Loy presents Stein as revealing the self-illuminating. Rather than depending upon external

‘traditional associations’ (p. 307), or ‘false experiences’ (*Survey*, p. 281), Stein’s words give off their own light.

The ‘purification’ of language by removal of inherited associations that Riding and Loy both praise in Stein is identifiable in their own aesthetics and poetry. In his notes on ‘Gertrude Stein’, Conover comments that Loy’s critical approach ‘applies to her own literary exercise’ (p. 203). Published in *Contact*’s first issue, December 1920, ‘O Hell’ is a foretelling of the ideas she would praise in ‘Gertrude Stein’. Loy depicts a natural landscape polluted by the waste of previous generations:

To clear the drifts of spring
Of our forebear’s excrements
And bury the subconscious archives
Under unaffected flowers

Literary innovation, coincident with seasonal renewal, can only be achieved by an active ‘clearing’ of historic influence. The ‘flowers’ of the new season are starkly contrasted with the ‘excrements’ of the past, an image similar to the ‘congealed’ ‘consciousness’ ‘crushed’ by Stein in Loy’s later poem (‘*Gertrude Stein*’, p. 305), and Riding’s depiction of Stein’s ‘purging’ (*Survey*, p. 281). Just as Loy later characterised Stein’s skill as purification by removal of received mental associations, ‘O Hell’ identifies history’s legacy as a mental inheritance. The ‘archives’ of the past are not only buried, but they are also already ‘subconscious’. The hard ‘c’ sound draws a link with ‘excrements’, reinforcing their placement in dirt. This dual burial transforms the natural landscape into a mental field. With the subconscious buried beneath, Loy invites us to read the ‘flowers’ of this analogy as artefacts of the surface-level conscious: thoughts expressed in language. Literary inheritance has a suffocating effect, limiting verbal expression: ‘Our person is a covered entrance to infinity | Choked with the tatters of tradition’.

However, this image indicates a layer of irony. Loy describes the flowers as ‘unaffected’ in a metaphor which would make this impossible. The ‘archives’ are positioned ‘[u]nder’ the flowers, and

the prior invocation of natural cycles causes us to question how a flower can be ‘unaffected’ by the conditions of the ground it grows in, or how conscious thoughts can form independently of the ‘subconscious’. Loy’s word choice is notable here. The work of the past is not *un* but *sub*-conscious, a reminder (made more explicit by the following line opening with ‘Under’) of what lies below the ground, and what ‘grounds’ new literary work. The title of the poem likewise directs the reader’s eye underground to the underworld. Apostrophe titles the poem ironically, as this clearing of the past influence opens with a literary convention so associated with the Romantic lyric.

As with Riding’s characterisation of Stein’s linguistic ‘newness’, her words ‘no older than the use she makes of them’ (*Survey*, p. 281), Loy considers the new in relation to youth in ‘O Hell’: ‘Goddesses and Young Gods | Caress the sanctity of Adolescence’. Nevertheless, Loy’s treatment of ‘Adolescences’ in ‘The Dead’, also written in 1919, (Conover, p. 194) strengthens the argument that ‘O Hell’ is at least somewhat ironic:

Among the refuse of your unborn centuries
In our busy ashbins
Stink the melodies
Of your
So easily reducible
Adolescence

Adolescence, for Loy, seems to have connotations of immaturity and uselessness rather than optimism or radicalism. Though the first line of ‘O Hell’ points towards the renewal of spring, references to natural cycles and youth simultaneously create a feeling of transience: ‘spring’, ‘flowers’, ‘Young’, ‘Adolescence’. The ‘rifts of spring’ emphasise this lack of permanence by associating the season with movement. Loy subtly draws attention to the transience of traditional systems by ironically positing them as eternally available for invocation. The words ‘infinity’ and ‘sanctity’ cannot be wholly taken seriously in a poem which has already mentioned

‘excrements’. By placing the ‘Goddesses and Young Gods’ of ‘O Hell’ within the context of ‘flowers’, the ‘sanctity of Adolescence’ and imagery of the underworld, Loy takes the poem directly into the register of Greco-Roman mythology. The entrance of these seemingly revered deities is immediately preceded by the reference to ‘the tatters of tradition’, complicating the poem’s engagement with classical imagery. Might this poem act as a warning against straightforwardly invoking classical works (‘forebear’s excrements’)? The poem itself seems to choke. An interjection grammatically and visually interrupts the poem after the first stanza: ‘Indeed –’ is indented further than the other lines and is itself cut off by an em-dash.

Loy’s poetry does not outrightly reject the influence of tradition. She acknowledges and engages with the avant-garde poet’s struggle against tradition’s pervasion, like the ‘[stinking] melodies’ of ‘The Dead’. Loy believed Stein ‘scrubbed the meshed messes of traditional associations off’ words (‘Gertrude Stein’, p. 307). In poems such as ‘O Hell’ and ‘The Dead’, Loy is concerned with this scrubbing.

Joyce Wexler points to a distinction between the purposes of Stein’s and Riding’s ‘scrubbing’ of language. Riding’s method makes ‘language an expression of humanness’ (in the sense of a universal human nature), whereas Stein sought to make language expressive of ‘nothingness’.²⁴ Riding’s work was an attempt ‘to destroy the personal associations of words to make language a medium for the universal’, while Stein’s purifying method resulted in the word becoming a neutral medium in itself (p. 58). ‘The Flowering Urn’, first published in *Poet: A Lying Word* (1933) with an amended version included in the *Collected Poems*, demonstrates Riding’s engagement with poetic language as a means of transcending the personal. The poem opens with an invocation of biblical parable:

And every prodigal greatness
Must creep back into strange home,
Must fill the empty matrix of

The never-begotten perfect son,
Who never can be born.²⁵

The opening ‘And’ creates a sense of continuation which, when succeeded by two imperatives (‘Must creep’, ‘Must fill’), gives the poem a liturgical, authoritative voice. Literary talent is characterised as wayward and roaming (‘prodigal greatness’), contrasted with the restriction of the personal constraints it is contained within. The anaphoric repetition of ‘Must’ aligns the ‘strange home’ with ‘the empty matrix’, associating the personal and familial with the unnatural and the empty. This theme is underlined by the negation and paradox of ‘The never-begotten perfect son, | Who never can be born’; the ‘perfect son’ is one who necessarily does not exist. This paradox reveals the fruitlessness of any attempt to contain ‘greatness’ within the limitations of inheritance.

Riding splits the familiar concept of the biblical ‘prodigal son’ in two, disrupting an ancient narrative. The words are separated on the page: we expect ‘son’ to come after ‘prodigal’, but Riding delays this satisfying familiarity by three lines. This separation is emphasised by her placement of ‘son’ at the end of the third line, underlining the position it did not fill in the first. Riding denies the comfort of reading a recognisable phrase. Instead she breaks it down, drawing our attention to individual words. This separation is not only linguistic but conceptual: instead of a unified ‘prodigal son’, Riding offers a ‘prodigal’ entity which fills the confines of a ‘son’-shaped mould, one meaning of ‘matrix’ (*OED*).

‘Matrix’ is a useful example of how Riding gestures towards meaning in postulating the universal. By placing the word in close proximity with ‘never-begotten’, Riding points to the historical use of ‘matrix’ for ‘womb’, a meaning woven further into the poem by its references to ‘seed’, ‘fertility’s lie’, ‘flowering’, ‘fruits’ and ‘[t]he virgin sleep of Mother All’ (*Flowering Urn*, p 129). Similarly, this natural imagery links with an obsolete use meaning ‘pith of a plant’ (*OED*). Through her interest in book production and her co-founding of The Seizin Press, Riding was likely to have borne in

mind the association of ‘matrix’ with the printing of words and letters, compounding her poetry’s frequent turn to the self-referential: it is the name for ‘a metal block in which a character is stamped or engraved so as to form a mould for casting a type’ (*OED*).

Loy often uses the same technique. To recognise the traditional influences buried beneath language, she continuously draws the reader back to the level of the word. Her poetry points to its own auditory and etymological echoes just as Riding, as argued by Wexler, ‘[tried] to wrench both cosmic and aural harmonies from language’ (p. 3). In ‘Poe’, first published in *The Dial* in 1921 (Conover, p. 196), Loy balances tensions between life and death upon links in sound and meaning. ‘Poe’ is a poem which, like ‘The Flowering Urn’, is also concerned with the relationship between the living and the dead, and literature’s endurance: ‘a lyric elixir of death | [...] sets | icicled canopy | for corpses of poesy’. Loy’s poem ends: ‘Where frozen nightingales in ilix aisles | sing burial rites’. The sound of ‘ilix’ echoes the first line’s ‘elixir’, directing attention to the words’ similarities:

a lyric elixir of death

embalms
the spindle spirits of your hour glass loves

However, this lexical harmony invites a closer look at the various meanings of ‘elixir’, a word which encapsulates the poem’s complication of literature’s relation to change and eternity, life and death. The word can be used to refer to an alchemical preparation for ‘[changing] metals into gold’ (*OED*), as a subject becomes a poem. This sense of transformation appears again in the word’s use for the ‘supposed drug of essence with the property of indefinitely prolonging life; [...] More fully, elixir of life’. Loy’s alteration of the full phrase aligns the act of writing with death: poetry induces stasis, embalms and buries the ‘hour glass loves’ of the temporal living (‘Poe’). By describing an ‘elixir of death’, Loy makes ‘elixir’ contradict another of its meanings: ‘A sovereign

remedy for disease' (*OED*). Her echoing of 'elixir' and 'ilix' ('Poe') leads the reader to contemplate the various meanings of these words, which in turn troubles this invocation of an historical literary figure. Depending on our reading of 'elixir', the lyric poem, and the eternal death it awards its subjects, is transformative, redemptive, paralysing or murdering. By emphasising this single word's various uses, Loy indicates that these processes are simultaneous. Death ironically allows the past to endure, like the evergreen 'ilix', and to become beautiful:

sets
icicled canopy
for corpses of poesy
with roses and northern lights

'The Flowering Urn' presents a similarly ambiguous view of death in relation to poetry, in which death is paralleled with the transcendent universal. Riding makes explicit her concern with poetry's ability to express universality. While the 'prodigal greatness' ('The Flowering Urn') of poetry is confined by the personal, there is another process at work:

And every quavering littleness
Must pale more tinily than it knows
Into the giant hush whose sound
Reverberates within itself

The two stanzas are grammatically mirrored, showing two processes acting in unison. Language's 'greatness' (referring now to its expansive universality, in addition to its aspirant perfection) is inhibited by the confines of the personal, the 'littleness' of language (its specificity, or the word as particular) is subsumed into the human universality Riding strives for: 'the giant hush'. In paling 'tinily', language is broken down into its parts to become a 'reverberation' of sound and etymology. Characterised by both silence and 'sound', Riding's conception of shared universality in

‘The Flowering Urn’ is both absolute (beyond particular expression) and communicable. Death becomes the archetype for this absolute universality: Riding unifies its wholeness with the word itself (with ‘whole death’ amended to ‘death-whole’ in 1938),²⁶ making ‘death’ generative in an inversion of expected order. Fertility is a ‘lie’, while death is truth:

Will rise itself, will flower up,
The likeness kept against false seed:
When whole death is the seed
And no new harvest to fraction sowing.

However, this inversion of natural processes and Riding’s repeated use of negation (‘never-begotten’, ‘never can’, ‘cannot improve’) suggests that we should not be too quick to read this poem at face-value. The final line finishes the poem with a note of impossibility: ‘The same but for the way in flowering | It speaks of fruits that could not be’. Death’s harvest does not bear ‘fruits’, only flowers which act as a reminder of what is lacking. This ‘flowering’ is false; like ‘fertility’s lie’ it speaks of what cannot be true. If the flowering urn does not speak truthfully, then perhaps we cannot trust ‘The Flowering Urn’. Though the poem may read as a consideration of language’s relationship to the universal and the particular, it may also read as a warning against the traditional, and an exploration of the relationship between art and reality. Literary tradition is, as in Loy’s ‘O Hell’ and ‘The Dead’, associated with ancestral inheritance and reproduction. The poet should not attempt to ‘fill the empty matrix’ of the ‘perfect son’: this is impossible, he ‘never can be born’. Likewise, the literary past is associated with death. The line ‘no new harvest to fraction sowing’ becomes ironic; the ‘sowing’ of already dead ‘seed’ takes precedence over innovation and newness. Mimicry of past poetry is unnatural: the ‘flowering’ of the ‘urn’ is only a surface beauty, promising ‘fruits’ that cannot be harvested.

It is clear that Riding places her poem in direct conversation with Keats’s ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’. A comparison of Riding’s final

lines with Keats's first suggests that Riding intends the poems' similarities to emerge slowly. Riding's last stanza reads:

Will rise the same peace that held
Before fertility's lie awoke
The virgin sleep of Mother All:
The same but for the way in flowering
It speaks of fruits that could not be.

She draws upon the language used by Keats, associating her urn with 'peace' and the virginal:

Thou still unravished bride of quietness,
Thou foster child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme.²⁷

The Keatsian urn expresses 'A flowery tale', while the flowering of Riding's urn is a speech act itself. Both urns speak of the unattainable: Keats's speaker lacks the skill to write as 'sweetly' as the urn's expression, Riding's tells of what death precludes. However, Riding does not straightforwardly reference Keats. Instead, 'The Flowering Urn' acts as a poetic version of her argument that the modernists, through a hyper-awareness of their place within poetry past, present and possible, 'swallowed [themselves] up by [their] very efficiency' (*Survey*, p. 264). By invoking one of the most central poems of the Romantic movement, Riding offers an ironic warning against poetry that is hyper-aware of its literary inheritance or positions itself as a 'perfect son' of the past. Her poem argues that such writing grows from the 'seed' of 'whole death', decoratively 'flowering' without the 'fruits' of substance. Riding refutes Keats's famous statement that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'. Her urn's 'flowering' is indicative of falsehood; '[i]t speaks of fruits that could not be'. Not only does Riding identify Stein as 'no older than her age conceived barbarically', using words 'no older than the use she makes of them' (*Survey*, pp. 280-81), she, like Loy, broaches

this anti-traditional theme in her own poetry by unsettling apostolic literary inheritance.

To conclude, Riding and Loy both identify Stein's movement against traditional influence, seeing the 'new' (in aesthetic and technique) as essential to poetry's development: her words are 'no older than the use she makes of them' and are given 'fresh significance'. Riding's 'The Flowering Urn' and Loy's 'O Hell' and 'Poe' demonstrate how they dealt with the legacies of the past in their poetry. Likewise, Riding and Loy show a shared desire for a 'purer', more material form of language and highlight linguistic malleability. In Stein's purifying methods, Riding and Loy identify a language capable of 'unsheathing [...] the fundamental' ('Gertrude Stein', p. 306) and '[expressing] the absolute' (*Survey*, p. 274) in a shared critical perspective which underlies the symmetrical preoccupations of their own poetry.

Eva Isherwood-Wallace is an AHRC-funded Ph. D. student at Queen's University Belfast, researching Laura Riding and her female contemporaries. In 2018, she was awarded the WTM Riches Essay Prize by the Irish Association for American Studies. Her poetry has appeared in numerous literary journals.

NOTES

¹ Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Pamphlet against Anthologies* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928), p. 7.

² Laura Riding, *The Poems of Laura Riding: A Newly Revised Edition of the 1938 Collection* (New York: Persea, 2001).

³ Jane Dowson, *Women's Poetry of the 1930s: A Critical Anthology* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 96.

⁴ Peter S. Temes, 'Code of Silence: Laura (Riding) Jackson and the Refusal to Speak', *PMLA*, 109.1 (1994), 87-89 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/463013>> [accessed 29 April 2021]

⁵ Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p. v.

⁶ Laura Riding, *The Close Chaplet* (London: Hogarth Press, 1926).

⁷ Deborah Baker, *In Extremis: The Life of Laura Riding* (New York: Grove, 1993), pp. 19-22.

⁸ Charles Bernstein, ‘Riding’s Reason: An Introduction to Laura (Riding) Jackson and Schuyler Jackson, “Rational Meaning: Toward a New Foundation of Words”’, *College Literature*, 24.3 (1997), 138-50 (p. 139) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25112333>> [accessed 29 April 2021]

⁹ Roger L. Conover, ‘Notes on the Text’, in Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp. 175-218 (p. 173). Loy’s poems discussed in my article are all taken from this volume.

¹⁰ Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: W. Heinemann, 1927), p. 274.

¹¹ Jeanne Heuving, ‘Laura (Riding) Jackson’s ‘Really New’ Poem’, in *Gendered Modernisms: American Women Poets*, ed. by Margaret Dickie and Thomas J. Travisano (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), pp. 191-216 (p. 193).

¹² Jane Marcus, ‘Laura Riding Roughshod’, *The Iowa Review*, 12.3 (1981), 295-299 (p. 298) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20155730>> [accessed 29 April 2021]

¹³ Emily Stipes Watts, *The Poetry of American Women from 1632 to 1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), p. 165.

¹⁴ Sara Crangle, ‘Mina Loy’, in *A History of Modernist Poetry*, ed. by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 275-302 (p. 275).

¹⁵ Carolyn Burke, ‘Gertrude Stein, the Cone Sisters, and the Puzzle of Female Friendship’, *Critical Inquiry*, 8.3 (1982), 543-64 (p. 560) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343265>> [accessed 29 April 2021]

¹⁶ Gillian E. Hanscombe and Virginia L. Smyers, *Writing for their Lives: Modernist Women, 1910-40* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), p. 113.

¹⁷ Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1933; repr. 2001), p. 144.

¹⁸ Kenneth Rexroth, ‘An Afternoon with Kenneth’, interview with Bradford Morrow, *Chicago Review*, 52.2 (2006), 176-89 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25742359>> [accessed 29 April 2021] (p. 188).

¹⁹ Marjorie Perloff, ‘The Witch of Truth’, review of Laura (Riding) Jackson and Schuyler B. Jackson, *Rational Meaning*, ed. by William Harmon (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997); Laura Riding, *A Selection of the Poems of Laura Riding*, ed. by Robert Nye,

Parnassus, 23.1 (1998), 334-53 <<http://marjorieperloff.blog/reviews/laura-riding/#ixzz5LdtX1DPk>> [accessed 29 April 2021]

²⁰ Virginia M. Kouidis, 'Rediscovering our Sources: The Poetry of Mina Loy', *boundary 2*, 8.3 (1980), 167-88 (p. 168) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/302972>> [accessed 29 April 2021]

²¹ Carolyn Burke, 'Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference', *American Quarterly*, 39.1 (1987), 98-121 (p. 99) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2712632>> [accessed 29 April 2021]

²² Mina Loy, 'Gertrude Stein', *transatlantic review*, 2.3-4 (September, October 1924), 305-09, 427-30 (p. 305).

²³ This material was reproduced in *The Last Lunar Baedeker* published by Jargon Society in 1982 and no longer in print. The relative rarity of the original publication has prevented Loy's essay from being widely discussed. Conover provides a few quotations (p. 203), but the full essay does not feature significantly in the critical literature.

²⁴ Joyce Wexler, *Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1979), p. 31.

²⁵ Laura Riding, 'The Flowering Urm', in *Poet: A Lying Word* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 1933; repr. 2017), p. 129.

²⁶ Laura Riding, 'The Flowering Urn', in *The Poems of Laura Riding: A Newly Revised Edition of the 1938 Collection* (New York: Persea, 2001), p. 224.

²⁷ John Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', in *John Keats: The Major Works*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 288-89.

The Claudian Trilogy and Its Early Criticism

Alicja Bemben

Abstract: The aim of this article is to present an overview of the Claudius novels criticism from 1956 to 1999. In this text, I intend to show three central pillars of this criticism: Graves's merging of the past with the present, fiction with history, etc.; structural perceptions of his novels; and interpretations of Claudius.

Keywords: *I, Claudius*, *Claudius the God*, Robert Graves, critics, scholarship

Since Robert Graves considered himself a poet first and foremost, it is not surprising that scholars attracted to his oeuvre have been predominantly concerned with its Parnassian part. Of course, this does not mean that Graves's other writings have commanded no critical attention. His autobiography, literary criticism, and historical novels have also been frequently chosen as objects of study by researchers. Amidst Graves's prose, the *Claudius* trilogy is one of the more studied works. Over the course of more than seven decades, criticism of these novels has grown substantially and, I believe, merits its own study as well. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to present an overview of the criticism of the *Claudius* novels.¹ In what follows, I concentrate on its early developments (beginning in 1956 and ending in 1999) and point out its three key pillars: Graves's conflating facets of the real – past and the present, private life and history, fiction and history, etc.; the structure of his novels, structural takes on the texts as prototypes or versions of the White Goddess myth; and, finally, interpretations of the character of Claudius.

The first work of criticism concerned with the *Claudius* novels is Martin Seymour-Smith's for-beginners guide to Graves's oeuvre published in 1956. In the section covering historical prose, the author advances the thesis that the scarcity of 'the inventive type

of imagination' and avid preoccupation with patterns of human behaviour propelled Graves to write historical novels. According to the critic, given the general frame of events, the writer concentrated on filling in the information gaps with knowledge derived from his intellectual inquiries and personal experiences. To substantiate this thesis, Seymour-Smith gives examples of how Graves employs the affinities between himself and his heroes to build up a masterly psychological profile of his characters. The writer's interest in men capable of history-making determined his choice of god-like Belisarius and Jason as well as divine Claudius and Jesus as objects of his fascination. Additionally, Seymour-Smith suggests that having an interest in soldiering in common with Belisarius and a sense of solitude with Claudius made Graves empathetically comfortable writing about them.² To point how the writer drew on his own life to give depth to historical figures, Seymour-Smith is the first one; and so, it is thus to him that one should attribute laying the groundwork for one of the pillars of Graves criticism. Graves's merging his private life with antique ones, as it is to be shown, became for the early critics one of the key points on which to expand in various directions.³

Most likely, capitalising on Seymour-Smith's idea that Graves translates his experiences into his works, J. M. Cohen investigates the captivating illusion that there is no 'lapse of time between event and description, and that there is no attempt on the writer's part to put the past into perspective'.⁴ Although this idea seems not to be explicitly related to Seymour-Smith's, the proposed line of arguments reveals some affinities between these two views. First, Cohen argues that the novelist's main tool to achieve the mentioned illusion is through closely modelling the language of the Claudius novels on the rhythms of his own real-life conversations. Second, the use of the analeptic method – suspending time and thinking in bygone terms – is to have enabled Graves to abandon himself in a detective-like pursuit of concealed truths and, *post hoc*, recreate the outcome of this pursuit as if the investigated events took place recently rather than in a remote past. And third, Graves's use of the new historical novel's assumption about 'the unchangingness

of human motive and action' (aiding him in explaining past events by means of psychology and the language of twentieth-century England) is held to be yet another of his tools of creating the adduced illusion of no lapse of time (pp. 70-79, 93-94).

As might be noticed, Cohen's arguments, explicitly informed by the perception that Graves concatenates his and bygone historical contexts, contribute to yet another pillar on which criticism of Graves's historical prose rests. In what follows, the reader might notice how other scholars of the dilogy also delve into what and how narrative techniques and tools are used in the dilogy to create particular effects.

The baton of Graves's relation to *Zeitgeist* is taken up by George Stade,⁵ who discusses how contemporary events, people, and theories impinge on the writer's oeuvre. Among the abundant observations Stade offers, his view on the modernist blurring of boundaries emerges as especially worth highlighting. The author maintains that 'the difference between fiction and history is not a clear one to Graves', and substantiates the thesis with two arguments. Firstly, commenting on the writer's idea that 'pure fiction is something beyond [his] imaginative range', he reminds his reader that just as Graves wrote 'history disguised as novels', so he also created 'fiction disguised as history'. Having enlarged on the above, Stade moves on to indicate that Graves's use of the analeptic method, according to which the researcher '*saturates* himself in the details of whatever he is investigating', assumes the blurring of this very boundary as well (emphasis mine) (pp. 34-37). Although my intention is not to show some teleological advancement of Graves criticism, I do believe that Stade's articles leave little, if any, doubt that Graves's merging (in this case, history and fiction as well as the past and the present) was crucial for the early critics of the dilogy. First, this and the two preceding texts deal with the question of how various aspects of the writer's life, especially psychological and socio-cultural ones, affected his works.⁶ Second, one might notice that early Graves criticism focused strongly on the authorial creation or use of various narrative tools in the dilogy.

That the above claims are not merely suppositions based on three sources is supported by the tendencies of other early critics. In the vein of those of his predecessors who were interested in the tools that Graves employs in his historical novels, John B. Vickery investigates the recurrence of certain motifs in some of these texts. The motifs which, as the author claims, might be prototypical or analogous to those presented in *The White Goddess*.⁷

However, from among these, I would like to adduce one that is also connected with the earlier mentioned pillar, that is Graves merging, in this case, facts and their interpretation. Even if Vickery, rather unduly, reads into Graves's suggestion that 'history is the record of infamy and the historian a dispassionate chronicler' (pp. 27, 37), when reflecting on *King Jesus*, he brilliantly demonstrates that the text is constructed in line with Frazer's model of establishing facts.⁸ Adhering to the Frazerian method, Graves is shown to draw forth happenings from the abstruse, inconsistent, and often distorted past in such a way so that they 'square with known rituals as well as with the demands for historical and documentary consistency'. Accomplishment of this task is, for the writer, the first step before he refines and presents the obtained data in the form of a historical novel that offers 'an accurate imaginative re-creation of [...] life, a re-creation that both records and interprets (pp. 50, 52-53).⁹ Although Vickery might seem inconsistent with his claims, he might also be seen as the one who shows yet another way in which Graves merges contrastive ideas; facts and their interpretation in this case.

Robert H. Canary is a scholar interested in the narrative construction of the *Claudius* books, and thus, appears to contribute to the construction of the 'structural' pillar of Graves criticism. In his text, he attempts to establish whether it is the novels' construction *per se* or their 'appeal to [fundamental] fantasies' that lies at the core of their success (pp. 83-86). Interestingly, while endorsing the factual value of these texts, Canary denigrates their structure. Neither does he find a unified plot in them, but merely distinct lines of action that coalesce into a story which, despite its 'miscellaneous character', does not differ from the framework modern historians often adopted; nor a radical portrait of *Claudius*

or misrepresented facts or tone of the used sources (pp. 83-86).¹⁰ As to why these count as drawbacks, he remains elusive but considers listing them enough to imply that, despite its ingenuity, the structure of the novels lacks extraordinariness.

What seems extraordinary to him, and what he deems responsible for attracting the public's attention to the dilogy, is that, while *I, Claudius* is an 'archetypal form of a Cinderella story' (the young hero is humiliated and endures much suffering before becoming the emperor), and *Claudius the God* is a story of betrayal (Claudius is punished for becoming a god), both these texts are also versions of the White Goddess myth (pp. 86-89). On the one hand, we might observe that Canary subscribes to the view of his predecessors that Graves implements in the novels the idea which crystallised in his mental universe years later. On the other hand, the author's novelty is the proposed Cinderella and betrayal structure; the latter of which might also be seen as the underpinning for the upcoming and much better-developed theories on Claudius (the third of the mentioned pillars of Graves criticism of the dilogy).¹¹

The first full-scale work to explore Robert Graves's historical prose is Katherine Snipes's 1979 monograph. In her text, the author first recounts some of the achievements of earlier scholars: Graves's approach to myths is comparative and genealogical, the themes of the good man in an evil world and the futility of war permeate *Count Belisarius*, and historical fiction combines history and fiction.¹²

She then offers some novelties. For instance, Snipes is the first critic to see the novels in terms of 'studies in the dynamics of power', and hence, the first one to attribute yet another but also very interesting structure to the dilogy. From her perspective, *Claudius* is a tragic hero corrupted by power, who, after 'painful self-examination', decides on self-destruction. This observation entails, for the author, the following evaluation: if the novel's main axis is the clash of a man with external forces, *Claudius* becomes an embodiment of the 'psychological conflict of a man with his own nature' (pp. 173-88). In this way, Snipes's work contributes to the perception of *Claudius* as a tragic hero. Finally, she uncovers the 'Myth behind [Graves's] Myths', and brings forth the already

familiar theory that all his characters are versions of the White Goddess myth figures: the heroines realise the pattern of the White Goddess who simply *is*, whereas the heroes are the failure-preordained *doers* (pp. 196–98).

Although it might be surmised that, typically for a biography, Seymour-Smith's account of Graves's life would be limited to interweaving the facts of the writer penning and publishing historical novels into the ongoing description of his life, it also offers evaluative commentaries on the dilogy. For instance, the biographer considers the *Claudius* books an escapist measure taken by Graves to flee from debilitating bankruptcy and subjugation to Laura Riding. The sublimation of these problems in the book is supposed to make *I, Claudius* an objective correlative for the writer's quandary, and the central figure of *Claudius* his caricature.¹³ Interestingly, in this way, the biography contributes to all the three mentioned pillars, i.e., the one concerned with how Graves's life merges with his writings, the structure of the dilogy, and the perception of *Claudius*.

Interestingly, Seymour-Smith's most important point, which might be extended to the *Claudius* books appears in his commentary on the proleptic-analeptic method used in *King Jesus*. Not only does Seymour-Smith define the method but also allows the reader to notice its intellectual 'origin'. According to him, Graves combined '[p]roleptic thought [...] defined as "the anticipation, by means of a suspension of time, of a result that could not have been arrived at by inductive reasoning", [with] analeptic thought [understood] as "the recovery of lost events by the same suspension" (pp. 389–94). The outcome of this procedure was then subjected to continuous and 'perfectly conscious' corrections with a view to retrieving, finally, the non-deformed past in question (p. 395). Although Seymour-Smith does not reflect on the background of Graves's historical techniques, readers may notice that he clearly draws from late nineteenth- century (conscious corrections) and early twentieth-century (interest in mentalities) ideas on history writing.

'The Values of a Classical Education' by Philip Burton offers a very similar take. In it, the author proposes that Graves draws on various facets of the Roman world to satirise contemporary leaders,

events, etc. Among the examples he gives, we read about Messalina serving as an accidental mockery of Mussolini, the demoralised ninth-century Germans ridiculing the twentieth-century Germans, the quandaries of ancient Britons' education travestying the malfunctions of the modern British schooling institutions.¹⁴ Having adduced in detail these and several other examples, Burton discusses the dilogy as an Apollonian text, including examples of Claudius visiting Apollo's oracle, performing a hymn to Apollo and Diana, discussing the Apollo-inspired type of history writing, and self-assuring that Greek (the language of Apollo) is everlasting.¹⁵ As we can see, Burton is the first scholar to note explicitly the satiric character of Graves's texts; an observation picked up in later texts.

For instance, by John Woodrow Presley, who reads *I, Claudius* as 'a tapestry of ironies', and elucidates how the book is pervaded with irony at numerous levels. The author shows that irony is discernible in the novel, for example, in the cosmic irony of the Sibylline prophecy on the descent of the Julio-Claudian emperors, the dramatic irony of the reinterpretation of classical history, and the verbal irony of Claudius's undermining his own historical prose style, and thus, making himself an unreliable narrator.¹⁶

Although it is Presley who is most concerned with the figure of Claudius, the three preceding studies also propose interpretations of the novels' central character. By this token, these texts contribute to the respective pillar of Graves criticism; however, they do so in different ways. For Snipes, Claudius is tragic; for Seymour-Smith, he is either tragic or satiric; for Burton and Presley, he is distinctively satiric. One may thus observe that, just as the criticism that focused on Graves's merging of often contrastive aspects of reality generated contrasting perspectives, so, too, did the criticism concerned with Claudius as a hero.

In *Statement and Story: Robert Graves's Myth-Making*, John Smeds argues that Graves's interpretative models make for 'a central vision, a unified image of reality and poetic experience' that permeates his oeuvre.¹⁷ In other words, he argues that the majority of Graves's writings are versions of the White Goddess myth; the idea which the readers of this article have already seen

in scholarly use. His other points also rehearse insights and ideas already present in the growing canon of Graves criticism, e.g., the untenable boundary between Graves's fiction and non-fiction; which, in the case of the *dilogy*, translates – to simplify – into the idea that its characters are either matriarchs of the proto-White Goddess type (e.g., Livia and Messalina) or ‘classic example[s] of ...] the Dying God’ (e.g., *Claudius*) (pp. 1-25, 251-59, 297-308). Thus, in a slightly ectypal manner, Smeds also contributes to the three mentioned types of Graves criticism of the *dilogy*.

New Perspectives on Robert Graves contains, among other texts, Ian Firla’s investigation into the structures and techniques of Graves’s narratives and Chris Hopkins’s comparison of the *Claudius* novels with the political historical novel of the 1930s. In ‘Epics Are out of Fashion’, Firla shares his observations on Graves’s historical writing method and narrator. He asserts that, when writing *Count Belisarius*, the multitude of conflicting records enabled Graves to select historical material that befitted his aim to present an ‘honest’ version of Belisarius’s life. The scholar does not extend his observation to the writer’s other novels, but the technique of materials selection to support a thesis seems to be applicable to the *Claudius* novels as well, and hence, by extension, enrich our knowledge on the nuances of their structure.

As to the narrator, Firla recapitulates many theses of earlier critics – for example, that, by speaking through the narrator, Graves creates a ‘subtle subtext [in which the writer] continues his attack on the society that he shows to have been “turn-coatish”’.¹⁸ Thus, he identifies the narrator as the key rhetorical device by which the writer asserts his beliefs and ensures that the reader sees in the novels more than just tales (p. 127). This, of course, allows us to see Firla’s text as yet another contribution to the scholarly knowledge of how Graves merges various facets of the real.

In the same volume, we find Chris Hopkins’s juxtaposition of the Claudian *dilogy* with the leftist political subgenre of the historical novel of the 1930s. First and foremost, Hopkins demonstrates the writer’s pull both to the Rankean idea of objectivity (which highlights the need for detailed and critical research, as well as for

an evaluation and criticism of various sources) and to the interpretative approach to history. He is thus the first critic to indicate clearly and explicitly Graves's use of methods emblematic of both late nineteenth and early twentieth-century historiography.¹⁹

Hopkins also touches on the differences between the *dilogy* and the political historical novel of the 1930s, which indeed offers a new perspective in the context of the many researches showing similarities between Graves's mental universe, his writings, and his socio-intellectual context. Essentially, the author notes that *Claudius*'s scant interest in the Republican political system and his avid preoccupation with the Republican virtues emanate from Graves's presuppositions about the irretrievability of liberty and inherent corruption, and his shift of interest from 'the possibilities of politics to the possibilities of an individual'. Hopkins reckons as well that the 'striking peculiarity of Graves's *Claudius* novels' consists in the passive hero construction. He believes that the protagonist is only a passive participant in events and their honest chronicler. The oxymoronic character of this claim does not prevent him from elaborating on the hero's *function* as an honest recorder of events, who offers his reader 'simultaneously personal and objective' truth and 'confidential history [...] completely private and completely public' (p. 134). In this way, Hopkins's text adds to the list of ways in which Graves merges / reconciles contrastive elements: in this case, kinds of truths.

Although the first fifty years of criticism of the *Claudius* novels might not seem to provide 'epic' clashes, the value of the discussed texts should not be underestimated. While some of the insights and ideas they propose might no longer be topical or tenable, without them, the state-of-the-art would not exist or be much poorer. Contemporary critics can propose new perspectives on Graves's texts also because of the achievements of their predecessors, to whom one must thank for creating a field as well as a body of work and keeping it alive.

Furthermore, many ideas of the early critics still serve as starting points for twenty-first-century discussions. Atypically, the texts of early Graves scholars are not homogenous and, by and large, escape

ectypality. What I do believe is their strongest feature is that they kept proposing various perspectives on the recurring subjects.

Alicja Bemben is Associate Editor of *The Robert Graves Review*. She is an Assistant Professor at the University of Silesia, Poland, and co-founder of the H / Story research group (<https://www.history.us.edu.pl/>). She has co-edited several monographs and authored a number of texts dealing primarily with historical novels, historiography, and their affinities. ORCID: 0000-0002-7342-774.

NOTES

¹ This overview includes criticism of Graves's other historical novels or texts only when such criticism sheds light on the Claudian trilogy. Digests and bibliographic data of the less pertinent criticisms of the trilogy are given in endnotes. I avoid working with the titles early Graves critics gave to their works because almost all of these combine the name of Robert Graves with a subtitle. In order not to confuse the reader with a number of texts entitled *Robert Graves*, I offer almost all the data in respective endnotes.

² Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves. Writers and their Work*, 78 (Harlow: Longman Group, 1956), pp. 8-11.

³ Conversely, in the sequel to this article, the readers might notice that, in the case of later criticism, scholars virtually unanimously disagree with Seymour-Smith's other claim, i.e. Graves being ectypal (in the sense of unoriginal or derivative). See, for instance, John Leonard, 'The Construction of Authenticity in the *Claudius* Novels', *Gravesiana*, 2 (Summer 2001), 259-72; Frank L. Kersnowski, *The Early Poetry of Robert Graves: The Goddess Beckons* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), p. 45; *Graves and the Goddess: Essays on Robert Graves's The White Goddess*, ed. by Ian Firla and Grevel Lindop (London: Associated University Presses, 2003); and *New Perspectives on Robert Graves*, ed. by Patrick Quinn (London: Associated University Presses, 1999).

⁴ J. M. Cohen, *Robert Graves. Writers and Critics* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 68.

⁵ George Stade, *Robert Graves. Columbia Essays on Modern Writers* (Irvington, New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), pp. 6-8: 'The

irony of Graves's career, then, is that the nature of his work is as much determined by the *Zeitgeist* as that of any poet'.

⁶ James S. Mehoke usefully classifies the approach that juxtaposes the author's life story, psychological development, and works, as 'biographical-psychological-literary'. James S. Mehoke, *Robert Graves: Peace-Weaver* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975), pp. 25-26.

⁷ John B. Vickery, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), *passim*. The Claudian trilogy was published in 1934-1935, while *The White Goddess* in 1948. Although early critics tend to see Graves's novels as proto-versions of the White Goddess myth, recent critics beginning with Firla and Lindop offer push-back against this claim.

⁸ There is much more to the books than meets Vickery's eye. He appears to be oblivious to the passages that present, for example, Claudio's scholarly, intimate, architectonic, etc., adventures.

⁹ As a matter of fact, Vickery reformulates Seymour-Smith's thesis on the reasons behind Graves's choice of the historical novel genre. He also notes the irony with which Graves imbues the story of Jesus. However, these are informative rather than critical notes. The issue of the historical novel as a form of recreation of the past is also briefly mentioned in Robert H. Canary, *Robert Graves* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), pp. 112-13.

¹⁰ These passages first appear in Robert H. Canary, 'History and Fantasy in the Claudio Novels', *Focus on Robert Graves*, 1 (1972), 3-8.

¹¹ It is doubtful whether Cinderella can be treated as an archetype. I would argue that Cinderella is a representation of the archetype of the maiden. R. K. Belcher, 'The Modern Cinderella in Chains: The Maiden in Servitude', *Hohonu. A Journal of Academic Writing*, 10 (2012), 62-65 <http://hilo.hawaii.edu/academics/hohonu/documents/vol10x16themode_rncinderellainchains.pdf> [accessed 24 April 2014]. Furthermore, the Cinderella and betrayal structures are an inalienable part of the books' appeal.

The next relevant study of the historical novels of Robert Graves, and yet another inquiry into the translation of the writer's life into his oeuvre, is by James S. Mehoke. In it, the critic sets himself the task of outlining a relationship between Graves's thinking and the political-intellectual trends of post-war Europe. In his opinion, Graves's unfavourable treatment of Christianity in *Count Belisarius* stems from his post-war disillusion with the religion that engendered either orthodox attitudes of fanaticism and asceticism or pacifism and libertinism. The repudiation of Christianity

and the turn toward the White Goddess visible in *King Jesus* is reckoned to be the writer's attempt to reconstruct these values, which Christianity was no longer able to make meaningful for him. Although Mehoke does not delve into Graves's worldview further, his claims that the writer uses his books to comment on his reality add to the texts-reality affinities listed by earlier critics of his historical novels.

¹² Katherine Snipes, *Robert Graves* (New York: Ungar, 1979), pp. 116-17, 167-72, 182. The first critic to describe Graves's preoccupation with the men who try to mould history is Martin Seymour-Smith (*Robert Graves*, pp. 8-11). Snipes picks up the topic, and Ian Firla enlarges on it 'Hello Again: A Return to the Themes of *Goodbye to All That*', *Focus on Robert Graves and his Contemporaries*, 2 (1993), 8-11.

¹³ Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves: His Life and Work* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 226-36. Seymour-Smith repeats his observation in Frank Delaney, 'Meridian: Robert Graves Special', *BBC iPlayer Radio*, 30 November 1982 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p03m0n4p>> [accessed 1 August 2021]

¹⁴ Philip Burton, 'The Values of a Classical Education: Satirical Elements in Robert Graves's *Claudius* Novels', *The Review of English Studies*, 46 (May 1995), 191-207.

¹⁵ Although one more work might be discussed at this point (Hyam Maccoby, 'Robert Graves and the *Nazarene Gospel Restored*', *Gravesiana*, 1 [June 1996], 46-51), I omit it from the main body of the text for two interrelated reasons. It delves into the details of the proleptic-analeptic method on the basis of *King Jesus*, and hence, segues into details that would not change the tenor of this article and does it not aptly. Maccoby criticises Graves's 'intuitive yet rational' method of reconstructing the past on the grounds that his analeptic technique seems too intuitive to be acknowledged as a historical method of research. For Maccoby, fallouts of this pseudo-epigraphic technique, in which the writer recreates certain incidents by hypnotically sinking into ancient times, are compelling but can be valuable only when supported by comprehensive historical knowledge and in-depth research into the available sources. Perhaps the greatest irony of this work is that Maccoby's argument might be turned against itself. He appears not to realise, as Presley observes, that the analeptic technique was just one of Graves's tools. For details on Presley's argument, see John Woodrow Presley, "Every Variety of Misrepresentation": Unreliable Narration in Chaucer and Graves', *Gravesiana*, 3 (2012), 592-614.

¹⁶ John Woodrow Presley, ‘Narrative Structure in Graves’s Historical Fiction’, *Gravesiana*, 1 (June 1997), 292-94, 301-04.

¹⁷ John Smeds, *Statement and Story: Robert Graves’s Myth-Making* (Åbo: Åbo Akademis förlag, 1997), p. 1.

¹⁸ Ian Firla, “‘Epic Are out of Fashion’”, in *New Perspectives on Robert Graves*, ed. by Patrick J. Quinn (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1999), p. 125.

¹⁹ Chris Hopkins, ‘Robert Graves and the Historical Novel in the 1930s’, in *New Perspectives on Robert Graves*, pp. 128-35.

A Different Look for ‘The Face in the Mirror’

Michael Joseph

Abstract: One of Graves’s paramount poetic concerns in the 1950s was with the relationship between the transcendent Goddess and his own mortal insufficiency – physical decay, bodily lust, violence, impulsiveness. This paper attempts an analysis of one of his signature yet often misunderstood poems ‘The Face in the Mirror’ within the context of other poems of his that share these concerns written during the 1950s as well as earlier. Likewise, it attempts to demonstrate the poem’s indebtedness to earlier English poets such as William Blake and John Skelton and how conversations with them shape its meaning.

Keywords: English poetry, poetic inspiration, the sacred and the profane

The Face in the Mirror

Grey haunted eyes, absent-mindedly glaring
From wide, uneven orbits; one brow drooping
Somewhat over the eye
Because of a missile fragment still inhering,
Skin deep, as a foolish record of old-world fighting.

Crookedly broken nose – low tackling caused it;
Cheeks, furrowed; coarse grey hair, flying frenetic;
Forehead, wrinkled and high;
Jowls, prominent; ears, large: jaw, pugilistic;
Teeth, few; lips, full and ruddy; mouth, ascetic.
I pause with razor poised, scowling derision

At the mirrored man whose beard needs my attention,
And once more ask him why
He still stands ready, with a boy's presumption,
To court the queen in her high silk pavilion.

Courting

At the 2012 conference of the Robert Graves Society in Oxford, Peter McDonald presented an interpretation of 'The Face in the Mirror' in which he tried to demonstrate deep similarities with Yeats's poem, 'The Spur':

You think it horrible that lust and rage
Should dance attendance upon my old age;
They were not such a plague when I was young;
What else have I to spur me into song?

In 'The Face in the Mirror', Graves is 'facing the truth' that men of a certain age must accept about themselves, that their lonely animal desires are finally what is real about them. McDonald gave a delightful performance, but despite its charm, I was slightly shocked by the reductivism of his interpretation and his materialist assumption that significance is (somehow) an inherent characteristic of the physical. I have no doubt he intended to be provocative by challenging Graves's well-known opinions about lust, stated, for example, in his *Paris Review* interview,¹ and perhaps he was playing devil's advocate and taking on the difficult role of the 'non-poet' (a role obviously antithetical to his own character) and grumpily chopping off at the root the sort of delicate arguments I am about to make. Regardless of his intent, I felt that McDonald set up a straw man omitting essential elements of the poem and the poet. Nevertheless, however much I dislike the argument, I'm grateful for having been forced to look more deeply at a marvellously complex, essential poem, which seems to have otherwise been overlooked in Graves criticism.

I will begin my analysis by noting the obvious: ‘lust’ *per se* never enters the poem, as it does of course in ‘The Spur’, in which there is no reference to love or affection. The poem’s first two stanzas, lines 1-10, provide a detailed description of facial characteristics. (We assume as we must they are Graves’s facial characteristics, but the poem doesn’t tell us.) Absent the title, we do not know that shaving or a mirror are involved until the first two lines of stanza three (lines 11-12). Then line 13 provides the pivotal question, ‘And once more ask him why’, followed by the final couplet, which also reads as an affirmation: ‘He still stands ready, with a boy’s presumption, | To court the queen in her high silk pavilion’. McDonald’s ‘lust’ reading makes hay with this couplet, particularly the old-fashioned ‘court’. ‘If courtship is a surprising thing for an ageing man to be getting up to’, he suggests (cleverly translating Graves’s catalogue of injuries into Yeatsian language), we are reminded also that this ageing man still possesses all of ‘a boy’s presumption’ (p. 688). McDonald then tells us that the persona in the poem is heterosexual, ‘albeit exaltedly so’; and then gives us this remarkable phrase:

The self ‘with razor poised’ might as well, perhaps, be putting an end to the life of that mirrored face (is Graves recalling for a moment, if only subliminally, Castlereagh’s gruesome self-dispatch?) as getting it into shape for a spot of courtship.

In the poem itself, there is no hint of suicide, so it seems as far off the mark as asking if Graves is contemplating breakfast or brokerage fees. Having ‘cracked’ the meaning of the poem, it seems to me that McDonald has tired of it, and assuming the reader requires diversion, tosses in Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, who, no surprise, committed suicide by slitting his throat in 1822. Am I missing something? (A sense of humour, perhaps?)

I understand McDonald’s reading of ‘court’ to imply amorousness. The *OED* includes in its definition: ‘To pay amorous attention to, seek to gain the affections of, make love to (with a view to marriage)’. But to read the line, ‘To court the queen in her high silk

pavilion' quite so literally seems hasty and wilfully prosaic, although, to be fair, the poem, with its clipped phrases ('low tackling caused it') invites one to perform that sort of reading, up to a point.

However, that reading is exactly what Graves is writing against; he is no more talking about 'courtship' than he is 'queens'. He is not courting, or as McDonald puts it, out for 'a spot of courtship'; he is 'courting the queen in her high silk pavilion'. One must honour the phrase in its entirety.

There is another *OED* definition of 'court', which I would argue is Graves's primary meaning: 'to show oneself desirous of, to seek to win or attract, to affect (a thing)'. In view of the poem's preoccupation with display, the notion of showing oneself or revealing an otherwise hidden aspect or aspiration seems more relevant than 'paying amorous attention'. And there is some external evidence to support my reading in the *OED*, which supplies as an example a remarkably similar usage by Thomas Fuller (1639):

Hist. Holy Warre iv. Viii. 183: 'Never would he have had the face to have courted the Crown Imperiall.'

'Courting the Crown Imperiall' and 'Courting the queen in her high silk pavilion' are near idiomatic phrases that signify ambition for lofty advantage. In Fuller's case, an ambition for worldly regard, in Graves's, otherworldly. And both phrases set off the petitioner's inadequacy with regard to face. Fuller's face is not actually a face, but an abstraction: a term signifying (again, according to the *OED*) impudence, effrontery or boldness. Graves's face is, or appears to be a face, a face apprehended in reflection, presumably Graves's face; and yet Fuller's quotation leads us to ask whether the face in the mirror is similarly an abstract symbol of impudence, or, as the poem itself later suggests, presumptuousness.

Certainly, all of his post-1948 readers would recognise that Graves means 'queen' to refer to The White Goddess, the subject of his book by the same name. The White Goddess was, for Graves, the intentional object of poetry and its warrant, that which the consciousness of poetry is conscious of and that which guarantees

the truth value of poetry, and therefore, his last line reveals that the poem's true subject is poetry and poetic devotion. 'The Face in the Mirror' is an act of presumptuous self-exhibition and self-assessment that reveals the irrational aspiration, not for hetero- or any other kind of sexual courtship, but to articulate poetic truth.

Under the gaze of The Goddess, poetry was a deadly task, for as Graves rehearses in *The White Goddess*, 'It is death to mock a poet | It is death to love a poet | It is death to be a poet'.² Here poetry is deadly in another sense – a sense perhaps that recalls Yeats's idea of 'death in life': a self-destroying event. Notice, the title asserts not *my* face in the mirror, but *the* face. Depersonalising the face, Graves detaches from the historical self.

In Graves's verbal economy, the amorous sense of 'courting' seized on by McDonald is not lost but subsumed in the semantic structure as a subordinate, secondary analogue: to prepare oneself for inspiration may be likened to the traditional rite of courtship. Indeed, the idea of preparing oneself for a sacred union is one of the central formulations of *The White Goddess*, and one sees it in many other Graves poems, 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice' being perhaps most prominent (and 'Mike and Mandy' perhaps the most contrary).

The similitude of courtship emphasises the poet's intensity and loyalty of purpose, his singlemindedness, while it also implies hopelessness, impertinence, self-delusion. Giving oneself over to such a proprietary enthusiasm, when one's best shot is describing one's bashed features in a quotidian shaving mirror, is ridiculous, although not un-Gravesian. We see this appealing self-effacing clownishness in 'Love Without Hope' (for example) a poem from *Welchman's Hose* (1925):³

Love without hope, as when the young bird-catcher
Swept off his tall hat to the Squire's own daughter,
So let the imprisoned larks escape and fly
Singing about her head, as she rode by.

²Courting the queen in her high silk pavilion constitutes a similar

self-mocking gesture toward a similar conundrum, but in a darker register, somewhere between that of the larks serenading the heedless object of their song, and the final couplet of ‘The White Goddess’: ‘We forget cruelty and past betrayal | Heedless of where the next bright bolt may fall’ (1948).

Unlike Yeats – whose feisty defence of ‘lust and rage’ seems more akin to Bertolt Brecht’s ‘Alabama Song’ (1927) – Graves is reaching with the presumption or face of the imagination through the unexceptional particulars of a lived life and a lived-in body toward a transcendence, while unabashedly emphasising the unbreachable gulf between his mortality and the object of his ontological longing.

There is another important way in which ‘The Face in the Mirror’ is unlike Yeats’s ‘The Spur’. Just as the poet’s aspirations do not implicate ‘lust’, they do not implicate ‘rage’. Images such as ‘Old world fighting’ and ‘low-tackling’ exemplify conflict and physical coarseness, but they are part of an elevated notion of combat that exalts honour and pride through which they assert a personal ethos, control in the midst of violence. They evoke rage but valorise its opposite, art. One could say ‘The Spur’ can be read to do likewise, and if so, I would agree on a basic similarity between the two poems. But I would suggest that reading of ‘The Spur’ would be uniquely Gravesean.

The Face

The organization of ‘The Face in the Mirror’ begins by calling the reader’s attention to the signifying qualities of the face, of features, then redirecting it toward an awareness of ‘the mirror’ (the poem’s *mise en scène* and the otherness of the face. We note that in line 12 the mirror divides the face from its beholder, who appears to have been conjured into existence, in a mood of Gravesean irritability (hardly rage), to minister to it. And this relationship seems a metaphor, similarly inverted, for the reader imagined by the poem. The reader reading the poem becomes the poet looking into the mirror. This parallel is anticipated in the poem’s first clause, ‘Grey,

haunted, eyes, absent-mindedly glaring', and thus we may speculate on its thematic properties, which acknowledge an agency beyond the poet / reader's control, 'haunting' his eyes, hijacking attention from the physical world (with its limiting mortal horizons), or gazing through it. Finally, attention settles on the realisation of the self's underlying youthful presumptuousness (line 14), and a vision of the 'queen in her high silk pavilion', another binary pair of perspectives (lowly child / lofty queen).

The poem presents a catalogue of changing views: an inventory of facial characteristics that are mapped to biographical incidents and personality traits ('pugilistic', 'frenetic', 'ascetic') preceding a confrontation of sorts, or some plot: an irritable fellow is roused 'once more' (one thinks here of the shepherd Watkin hearing an inner voice in 'The Gnat') from some inexplicit slumber to perform a barber's service, although, like the saucy Figaro, he brashly poses his usual question; then this scene dissolves into a kind of split-screen, in one half of which we see, let us call it, an emblem of boyish presumptuousness and in the other, a brilliantly moonlit sky. Here the program ends, as the screen fades to overarching sky. The poem ends gazing upward, either directly or indirectly (through the mirror).

The tonal changes form an interesting parallel remaining level (sommolent or somniloquent) over two stanzas, and then abruptly quickening, becoming both derisive and amused, while yet enthralled. The modulation to the final couplet is one of the most Mozartian of moments in all of Graves's poetry. Many of his poems end with an anagnorisis, and an abrupt shift, but few with such a profoundly sweet modulation.

This final revelation is the last in a progression, beginning with coarse flesh, rising into a sort of self-consciousness, or an awareness of self-consciousness (lines 9-10), and then finally, transcendence. In his *Paris Review* interview (1969), responding to an observation that his poems, especially his love poems, 'get more intense' as he ages, Graves says: 'One gets to the heart of the matter by a series of experiences in the same pattern, but in different colours'.⁴

'The Face in the Mirror' can be thought of in terms of a series of

experiences in the same pattern (in a darker hue) as ‘The Portrait’ (1951), a poem published seven years earlier. ‘The Portrait’ presents the same simple, nondiscursive series of descriptions from a single, clear perspective (e.g., ‘she speaks always in her own voice, even to strangers’, ‘She can walk invisibly at noon’, ‘She is wild and innocent, pledged to love through all disaster’). Then, with a concluding question, the perspective is flipped: ““And you, love, as unlike those other men | As I those other women?””

The object of the poem’s attentive gaze snaps to life and interrogates the interrogator. As with ‘The Face in the Mirror’, whose invocation of The Goddess declares a conscious engagement with the nature of poetry, the reading and writing of poetry in ‘The Portrait’ is proposed metaphorically as a reciprocal dynamic between reader and text, a mutual making, or collaborative revelation.

The development of both poems depends on the reader’s powers of concentration and their investment in looking. For the persona of ‘The Face in the Mirror’, looking means filling himself with the object of his attention – reciprocally bringing the object to life – and self-awakening. The concentration with which the gaze of the poet illuminates select physical characteristics smoothly translates into the attention an exemplary reader pays to the formal and symbolic demands of the poem. In its rawness, ‘The Face in the Mirror’ posits an exact correlation between the particulars that construct the face in the mirror and those that construct the poem. And yet, even as the adumbration of the brutal and self-sacrificing – ‘ascetic’ – personal experiences invite attention to Graves’s work on *this* poem, readers must interpret it within the context of his lifelong dedication to poetry, his savagely ‘archaic’ muse worship, and, I would argue, to the gesture poetry makes to its reader, its *courtesy* (*OED*: ‘courtly elegance and politeness of manners; graceful politeness or considerateness in intercourse with others’). This double exposure posits a split within the reading experience that resonates the dialectic of selves.

The Gap

Greater than the force of romantic love apostrophised in ‘The Portrait’ is the recognition of the gap between the poet and the object of his adoration. As in ‘The Face in the Mirror’, the gap is ontological. The separation here is suggestive of the ballet *Afternoon of a Faun* choreographed by Graves’s friend, Jerome Robbins on Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après midi d’un faune*, and debuted in 1953, just five years before Graves published ‘The Face in the Mirror’. Unlike the earlier Nijinsky ballet (1912), the setting of Robbins’s piece is a dance studio, and the interaction between the dancer / poet and the ethereal nymph is entirely imaginary. Robbins’s vision is of the transcendent imagination. The body serves as a refined instrument and the dance a medium for the dancer (and choreographer) to achieve communion with his spiritual inspiration.

‘The Face in the Mirror’, while occupying a different aesthetic universe, dramatizes a similar ontological separation, through detachment and objectification. Although Michael Kirkham calls the poem ‘contently autobiographical’,⁵ it is neither contented (the poem derides complacency), nor necessarily autobiographical: the ‘auto’ is just not that simple. The persona who speaks the poem is at one remove from it. The facial details are rendered neutrally, almost in the manner of a coroner’s report. The poet’s discipline and detachment, his ability to abandon both face and mirror – even implicitly to abandon the text of the poem – to make himself an instrument for poetic truth is a gesture of possible worthiness (in the face of manifest unworthiness).

In the Mirror

The poem repeats a sort of psychic meiosis that Graves had articulated between the persona / writer (‘I’) and ‘reader’ (‘you’) earlier, in ‘The Reader Over My Shoulder’ (1930). While I agree with Dannie Abse who notes in *Encounter*, Graves’s dialogue with an imaginary reader is ‘internally directed soliloquy’,⁶ the poet

negotiating with his other self (an internal critic), I want to press the idea that it can also be about a reader's negotiation with an author. One dialogue becomes multiple dialogues. This multivalent condition of being lies at the heart of the poem. When one reaches the end of the second stanza, 'In damned confusion of myself and you?', the reader cannot feel confident he knows who is 'myself' and who is 'you'.

In 'The Face in the Mirror', one can spin the direction of the action similarly; the poem's narrative presents us both with a man gazing into the mirror at a face that has suddenly appeared, and a face addressing the 'mirrored man' – an upright man presumably peering into the mirror. The face might be an apparition conjured up by an unknown agency behind the reflective properties of the glass. The man might be a flesh and blood creature who has drawn close to the mirror (from elsewhere) because he conceives of it as an oracle, or the prelude to a fairy tale. We know his 'beard' needs attention, but what the man needs is unspecified.

The ambiguity of exactly *who* is speaking to *whom*, articulated in the odd phrase, 'the mirrored man whose beard needs my attention', a verbal sleight of hand, encourages us to think the reflection is more than optics. It possesses autonomy and agency. It acts on the world. (Here occurs the only instance of the first person singular possessive pronoun 'my'. The only attribute Graves claims as his own in the poem is his attention – though he does not claim himself as the claimant.) This personification undercuts any naïve assumptions the reader might have of the superior reality of the physical, the hairy, second-hand, 'too-human shape', although neither figure, bearded reflection or scowling interrogator, can assert greater being: each is a function of the other, and no perspective dominates.⁷ The poem insists (much as does 'In Broken Images') that ultimately both entities are mediated by the poem, and the poem by its transcendent queen.

The affect of 'The Face in the Mirror' with regard to the 'mirrored man' is cool ambivalence. Despite his 'scorn' and 'derision', the persona admits there is something remarkable about the 'mirrored man' that it cannot fathom. *He* has the presumption; he has an

intuition of, and acts toward, the ineffable. Although the persona uses the idiomatic ‘queen in her high silk pavilion’ in the manner of Fuller, its resonance (it lingers as if there were a fermata marking over it) contains an unmistakable note of reverence. Derision and scorn shade into admiration and wonder. The logically-minded persona cannot grasp why the ‘the mirrored man’ (already the worse for wear, reminiscent of Ransom’s ‘Captain Carpenter’ [1924]) would again place himself in harm’s way.

The binary of self and reflection, or subject and object, with non-Aristotelian implications, appears in other mirror poems in Graves’s oeuvre, including the early and problematic, ‘The Pier-Glass’ [published in 1921, rev. in 1938],⁸ where the persona is an emotionally tormented ‘ghost, though yet in woman’s flesh’, who studies her reflection in ‘[a] sullen pier-glass, cracked from side to side’.⁹ Like the character of the woman, split between ghost and flesh, the mirror is divided between top and bottom. The redundancy forces on us the idea of division, which is once more expressed in the reflection the mirror presents to the ghost woman of a face as ‘melancholy | And pale, as faces grow that look in mirrors’. The poem seems to be warning us, almost with a playful frisson, that we may also be courting danger by reading, that a treacherous and unavoidable symbiosis exists between subject and object, reader / poet and poem.¹⁰

The act of gazing spellbound into a text / mirror attains greater moment in ‘The Face in the Mirror’ and although both the mood and gender of the mirror-gazer have changed, the operation of an uncanny, transforming symbiosis remains. Although, when he wrote and revised ‘The Pier-Glass’, Graves had yet to discover The Goddess, it is clear the mirror embodies some of the characteristics of the poetical imagination and some of the poem. The analogy occurs directly as well as inferentially.

Looking through the window, the ghost woman describes ‘cold skies | Half-merged with sea’, which she dismisses as an ‘abstract, confusing, welter’. Obviously, the window is another kind of glass, and therefore a binary opposite to the pier-glass. Describing the natural world as ‘abstract, confusing, welter’, Graves anticipates

Robert Frost's definition of a poem as a 'momentary stay against confusion' (see Howe 1963). The opposite of this vision of the world as a meaningless vista should be poetry, and so by association we incline towards the idea that the pier-glass is a symbol of poetry of some kind.¹¹ The association with The Goddess in this poem might reinforce this reading.

There are other associations between the two poems that Graves may have wanted us to ponder. The ghost woman in 'The Pier-Glass' bids herself: 'Peer rather in the glass once more, take note | Of self, the grey lips and long hair dishevelled, | Sleep-staring eyes'. The adumbration of eyes and lips reoccurs in 'The Face in the Mirror'. Could Graves have intended readers (whatever one might mean by that word) to contemplate the two sets of images together? Writing 'The Pier-Glass' he was twenty-five or twenty-six, drawing on poems (e.g., 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner');¹² thirty-seven years later, in 1958, he is deriving himself from his own poems. They have become conditioning antecedents of his work. After the Goddess poems of 1948-1953, his poetry becomes an interpretation and narration of earlier poems, as much as of novel experiences – and to an extent even his novel experiences become an interpretation and narration of the past. The continual purging and realigning of his collected poems was his best effort to reveal how both work and life should be understood.¹³

Graves's appraisal of his poems is dispassionate and neutral: on one hand, they constitute a kind of sacred history, a true account of who he is; but on the other, they represent a series of inadequate constructions, counterparts to the self-delivered blows, wounds and scars of 'The Face in the Mirror'. His self-appraisal may be likened to the ghost woman's split view and the cracked mirror. They are both sacred and profane: the sort of failures he will poignantly and, I would argue, ironically, lament in 'A Last Poem' (1964) and will characterise impersonally in 'Timeless Meetings' (1973) as 'all faults of history | And bodily disposition'. Moreover, contemplating 'sleep-staring eyes' and 'haunted eyes' together might tempt us to mistrust our own habitual analytical enterprise of teasing out possible meanings as a kind of haunting. Our 'eyes', like theirs (his and hers),

are haunted by the seemingly magical hermeneutic process that in fact mirrors or prefigures the haunting that we are examining. Both poems pay ‘meticulous attention to detail’ (as Douglas Day notes about the earlier poem),¹⁴ and foregrounded by those precise details, readers will observe, is the act of paying meticulous attention, of attending, of performing a service. Where Graves’s older persona, ‘razor poised’, has revelation thrust upon him by the mirror, the ghostly woman turns to the mirror pleadingly. Kirkham suggests ‘she prays to the mirror’ (p. 48). A similar relationship obtains in the final stanza of ‘End of Play’ (1938), a mirror poem published in the same volume as Graves’s revision of ‘The Face in the Mirror’.

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.

Here ‘kneeling’ seems polysemous. The dominant meaning gives the position of the couple: they are kneeling (to be beheaded). The poet perceives the metaphor in physical form, dramatising both the irrevocable seriousness of love newly understood, and his intensified apprehension of his calling. However, a subordinate meaning of kneeling alludes to a traditional marriage ceremony, in which the couple kneel before the altar (a nuptial rite of passage, a death and rebirth). And, as in ‘The Pier-Glass’, kneeling might be construed to indicate prayer or awaiting a benediction.

In his analysis of this poem, Kirkham identifies ‘the echo standing for reflective thought and the mirror for imagination’ (p. 164). Kneeling, then, before the symbol of the imagination, the poet deferentially offers his life and service to a higher power – to Truth. The conjunction of reflective thought and imagination here in a single line of verse illuminates the central image of ‘The Face in the Mirror’; and we find a further connection in the revelation of the headsman’s axe, which Graves will repeat in poems of the fifties in ‘Darien’, where it becomes a Cretan axe, and implicitly in ‘To Juan at the Winter Solstice’. In ‘The Face in the Mirror’,

the headsman's axe becomes a 'razor poised', a deterministic symbol of surrender and wholehearted commitment.¹⁵

The Pier-Glass volume contains another poem with a cracked mirror that is worth glancing back at, 'The Magical Picture'.¹⁶ The broken, dislocated, fragment of the mirror found lying on the roadway lacks any explanatory power or salutary effects. What the characters in this poem see when they look at their reflection only reinforces (with seeming mischievousness) their various solipsistic obsessions, so that a child sees a hobgoblin, a priest sees a saint, a pretty wife a jealous rival, and a sailor Lord Nelson. I argue in "Orphans of Poetry", that Graves intends its brokenness to signify the unreliability of empirical data as a source of knowledge. While 'The Pier-Glass' may suggest the mirror as a symbol of poetry and poetic imagination, the broken mirror found on the roadway implies the necessity of reaching beyond experience and the senses for knowledge, an idea reiterated in 'End of Play', where the exaggerated responses to sensual stimuli seem to reference the absurdities of 'The Magical Mirror'.

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.

'The Face in the Mirror' extends the argument by asserting that transcendence can only be mediated by inspiration. The crack in the pier-glass mirror may be an imperfection, may surely seem so to 'sleep staring eyes', or 'haunted eyes', but on deeper inspection may reveal itself as a potential source of inspiration, a break or wound in time, the bidding of The Goddess.

Another mirror, with fully mythopoeic properties, and a concern with the ontological weight of self and self-reflection appears in 'Alice', a poem published a few years after *The Pier-Glass* in *Welchman's Hose* (1925). Here, again, Graves turns to a children's text, more explicitly than he had Coleridge's *Rime*, or the generic ghost story:

For Alice though a child could understand
That neither did this chance-discovered land
Make nohow or contrariwise the clean
Dull round of mid-Victorian routine,
Nor did Victoria's golden rule extend
Beyond the glass: it came to the dead end
Where empty hearsesturn about.

Drawing on Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, Graves dilates on the transportive qualities of mirrors. The mirror now propels us into the world behind the mirror, into *illo tempore* – the timeless realm of Poetry in which 'magic is supreme and where, therefore, things happen which realistically minded strangers find difficult to understand'.¹⁷ Moreover and importantly, the mirror world with the capacities and agency of the poetic imagination triumphs over the grave. Where the mirror world begins, 'empty hearsesturn about'. The hearsest are empty because the burden they bear is unreal: being merely physical now, death doesn't exist. It is ontologically weightless.

'Alice' reactualises the mythic confrontation revisited in the 'The Pier-Glass': a woman faced by a glass. By shifting genres from gothic ghost story to fairy tale, Graves relieves the terror concomitant with irrationality by replacing ambiguity, aversion and introspection with innocence and imaginative play. Where Graves kneels before the mirror, Alice pounces, cognitively (exercising her 'uncommon sense') as well as physically, embracing the mirror world 'As queer but true'. Using 'queer' almost as an intertext,¹⁸ Graves has Alice speak for him. He, in essence, enters the mirror world of the text by allowing the mirror world to speak through him. He becomes its mirror.

In 'The Face in the Mirror', Graves transposes this face-off between moribund actuality and romantic imagination into the realistic or mimetic mode – mimetic that is until the poem's final leap to or into romance. The 'mirrored man', despite his outward appearance as a grizzled campaigner, is inwardly an ageless 'presumptuous' boy (possessing imaginative vigour, like Alice),

and it is with that boyish presumptuousness the poet asks, to paraphrase, ‘How has this unfathomable fact of my devotion survived (both the brutality of physical existence and the numerous failures of poetic skill)?’

The Queen

If there is a ‘queen in her high silk pavilion’ implicit in ‘Alice’, she is the antithesis, or mirror image of Queen Victoria. Her proper domain, the domain of the sacred, begins where Victoria’s leaves off, the profane, where ‘hearses turn about’ – where the physical world has been inverted into the metaphysical; and, in contrast to Victoria (a conventional queen whose powers are merely an expression of traditional social organisation lacking absolute value), her powers are real. They are self-authenticating aspects of a sacred modality. From her ‘high silk pavilion’, she has jurisdiction over all that lasts, all that has force, truth, durability (all that survives ‘cruelty and past betrayal’), which one recognises through revelation (and according to the canons of poetic judgment). Unlike Victoria, the Goddess transcends time and space, just as true poetry may outlast empires: even the alphabets in which poets write it.

One might go so far as to say that ‘The Face in the Mirror’ is as preoccupied with timelessness as it is with poetry. We might infer that attending to a beard signifies curing the underlying cause, ageing, not merely the symptom. The depersonalisation of that ‘mirrored man’, the mutable creature, asserts separateness from the local effects of time, and thereby a separation from time, itself. When Graves ‘pauses with razor poised’ (line 11), he steps out of time. Joining the sound ‘pause’ / ‘poised’ isn’t merely decorative phrasing; it’s a break from verbal flow: a timbral standing still. Line 12 duplicates the act, as it pivots attention from the lineaments of ageing to the ‘echoing mind’. This moment of disjunction, which anticipates the transport of the poem’s concluding couplet, can be thought of as occurring in and reactualising the same moment Alice appears in the mirror world – in that time, in *illo tempore*: an archaic

time that interrupts profane historical duration, the moment in which all sacred acts occur, for, Mircea Eliade asserts, each is merely ‘a copy of the primordial act of the creation of the world’.¹⁹

This is an ancient time sense that finds an early perch in Graves’s poetry: in 1923, for example, in ‘Against Clocks and Compasses’:

I deny to Time his terror;
Come-and-go prevails not here;
Spring is constant, loveless winter
Looms, but elsewhere, for he comes not near.

The gesture of withdrawal in ‘The Face in the Mirror’ completes itself in the recognition of ‘a boy’s presumption’, a recognition not of callow importunity or priapic youth but of an essentially immutable self – a self capable of *praesumtiō*, of taking in advance, not a liberty, but intuition: a boy’s *praesumtiō* breathes in the breath or the *inspirātiō* of the Muse.²⁰

Once the poem abolishes time by valorising presumption, the final couplet’s assertion (which deepens the question ‘why’ and answers it) becomes possible, as does the poet’s entry into archaic time, whose archaism Graves mindfully underscores by the stubbornly pre-modern diction of the final phrase, ‘court the queen in her high silk pavilion’. This characteristically Gravesian metaphor is quite economical, dense with complicated layers of meaning and association (none of which includes the notion of a hot date).

Her High Silk Pavilion

Let’s take a closer look. At the simplest and most literal level, ‘The queen in her high silk pavilion’ signifies the moon in the sky. The word ‘pavilion’, intensified by the adjectives ‘high silk’, asserts the splendour and fineness of the Queen’s lodging – the power and subtlety of poetry, whose power transcends the mundane just as the moon does the earth. Referencing Robert Grant’s nineteenth-century hymn, ‘Oh Worship the King’, in which God, ‘The King’, is

‘pavilioned in splendour’, the phrase also implies an otherworldly prestige; she is no earthbound queen, nor terrestrial satellite.

Pavilion also echoes the battlefield imagery of stanzas one and two, recalling that soldiers sheltered within pavilions in medieval and renaissance battle. (See for example *Romance of Alexander* by Jehan de Grise, fourteenth century, *De Machinis* by Paolo Santini, fifteenth century, *Battle of Duras*, *Chronicles of Jean Froissart*, fifteenth century, and the *Guiard des Moulins*, fifteenth century.) Thus pavilion establishes the mirrored man’s lineage; he is of the same stock as the bold, self-sacrificing soldiers of the past.

Pavilion may also call attention to the aural nature of poetry, as the pavilion can designate the cartilaginous part of the outer ear. We may infer the very presence of the queen, or the breath of the muse / Goddess, from the music of the poem. In this context, the poem itself assumes mirroring properties, but mirrors that which cannot otherwise be seen.

A similar imagery appears in *Milton, A Poem*, in which Blake refers to the sky as ‘an azure Tent with silken Veils’; and ‘an immortal tent built by the Sons of Los’.²¹ Blake’s tent is not merely an evocative phrase, notes David Whitmarsh-Knight, but a metaphysical one. The sky-tent’s metaphorical fabric is expandable; it stretches to accommodate the ‘temporal and spatial realities of eternal life’.

In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Eliade notes the sky is ‘pre-eminently the ‘wholly other’. ‘Behind the sky [primitive humanity] simultaneously discovers the divine incommensurability and [its] own situation in the cosmos. For the sky *by its own mode of being*, reveals transcendence, force, eternity. It *exists absolutely* because it is *high, infinite eternal, powerful*’. (Emphasis in the original) (pp. 118-19).

Graves has chosen his archaic phrase to express a similar intuition. As well as pointing at the sky’s transcendent properties, his ‘high silk pavilion’ evokes the capacity of the poetic faculty to experience the sky beyond our normally ‘shrunken’ range of perception as ‘high, infinite, eternal, powerful’. Graves may be working within the constraints of realism, trimming his mythology to be caught as a

reflection on idiomatic English, but like Blake, his imagery grounds itself in religious ontology.

‘The queen in her high silk pavilion’ lifts the poem from the mimetic to the romantic mode, as I have already mentioned, privileging a different structure of cognition and reframing preceding description, implying that, solid as the physical details may have seemed, their solidity is deceptive, a mirage. While the attempt to write poetry may seem like overreaching from an earthbound perspective (one that asserts control in its mature, grounded acceptance of mutability – the sort of aesthetic Yeats features in ‘The Spur’), in the moonlight and possessed of the expanded awareness conferred on the poet who beholds the sky-tent and its dazzling queen, its ultimate reality is revealed as a gesture of innate receptivity, a surrender of personal agency to Truth. Like Alice’s doings in the mirror-world, the poetic experience, with reference to the ‘high silk pavilion’ bears just a glancing resemblance to the daily experience of mundane England, but that is the stuff the poem is made on; hence the poet’s ragtag appearance is a repudiation of earthy notions of handsomeness and wholeness. The regnant light of the moon prevails over what Blake in *Milton* calls the ‘rags of memory’. And, of course, it is also feasible to read the biting question *why* as mock cynicism, or as a performative utterance, like a subconsciously contrived dream signal, intended to jolt the mirrored man (standing in for the reader) out of a trance-like stupor, to look up.

‘The queen in her high silk pavilion’, the moonlit sky, illuminates a dimension of being in which the foregoing physical flaws and disfigurements can be made to cohere as a poem, or at least the outer surface of one: here, in this sphere, where message and medium and meaning cohere, poetry becomes possible. Graves frequently ends a poem with a question, a propensity that increases in the 1950s and trails off after 1965.²² The concluding question serves several interesting functions falling outside the scope of this essay; but in this particular case, the rhymed catalogue of manly parts that constitute the first part of ‘The Face in the Mirror’ cannot be understood as a poem without the final question – or rather, final

assertive couplet containing the romantic image burdened by a question mark. The poem as a poem virtually comes into being just as it ends. The phrase, ‘The queen in her high silk pavilion’ then, seems momentarily to stop the forward flight of time as it redirects our thoughts back over the text’s preceding anatomy and subverts our previous understandings and terminating the text.

Dispatching the poem’s materiality, the final couplet whisks us into a dimension we might liken to Blake’s Beulah, the notional source of poetic inspiration where ‘contrarieties are equally true’. In Beulah, to apply the analogy, the courtier’s physical imperfections would have no power; only his disposition toward poetry and inspiration (*his praesumptiō*) is real.

We can see more clearly and confidently that Graves is questioning the relationship of poetic inspiration to the mundane by tracing his ‘pavilion’ back further, to John Skelton, whose vision poem, ‘The Garland of Laurel’ uses comparable imagery toward comparable ends. In ‘The Garland of Laurel’, Skelton stoutly advocates his own poetic merit. The narrative begins in slapstick self-deprecation, as he finds himself alone in the Forest of Galtres, half-drunk and soaked in mire. From here, his sodden meditations wend into a dream: (stanzas 5-7):

Whylis I stode musynge in this meditacion
 In slumbrynge I fell, and halfe in a slepe
 And whether it were of yimaginacion
 Or of humors superflue, that often will crepe
 Into the brayne by drynkyng ouer depe,
 Or it proceded of fatall perswasion,
 I can not tell you what was the occasion

But sodeynley at ones, as I me aduysed
 (As one in a trans or in an extasy)
 I sawe a pauylion wondersly disguised
 Garnysshed fresshe after my fantasy,
 Enhachyde with perle and stones preciously
 The grounde engrosyd and bet with bourne gold,
 That passynge goodly it was to beholde

Within that, a princes excellente of porte
But to recounte her riche abilyment
And what estates to her dyd resorte
Therto am I full insuffycient

A goddesse inmortall she dyd represent
As I harde say, Dame Pallas was her name;
To whom supplied the royll Queen of Fame.

Standing beside the court of fame, configured as a magnificent pavilion set with precious stones, the poet eavesdrops on a debate between Pallas, the goddess of wisdom, and the Queen of Fame about the worthiness of Skelton's literary reputation. The question of his acceptance into the court is only settled when past poets laureate adjudicate his poetic 'record' – in this case, a long bibliography – then joyfully acclaim him one of their company.

Superficial similarities signal to thematic ones: the ontological question in 'The Face in the Mirror', how can common clay aspire toward immutable truth, corresponds to the explicit issue of 'The Garland of Laurel': how can one presume to merit the immortal title of poet in light of the circumstances of mortal existence. The notion of 'immortal title' is more explicitly a phenomenological one in Graves (just as his acceptance into the company of poets is a matter of his own internalised discourse), a point he makes again most poignantly in 'A Last Poem', envisioning himself in old age waiting for the Goddess to release him from his service, 'well wrapped in a many-coloured cloak | Where the moon shines new through Castle Crystal' (1964). As D. N. G. Carter has illuminated the pathos of the poem, reading it as a testament of Graves's stoic acceptance of the 'hapless fate' of being a poet (pp. 255-56), I will emphasise the element of ironic self-mockery. Contrary to the heroic image of the muse poet sailing out to seek The Goddess in 'The White Goddess' or bartering life for love in 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice', here is the poet as feeble retainer, doggedly scratching out inadequate poems deep into senility, feebly mumbling 'am I a poet?'.²³ But as in 'The Face in the Mirror', the final lines are transformative:

Shall I never hear her whisper softly:
‘But this is truth written by you only,
And for me only; therefore, love, have done’?

With this inspired sentence, set over three lines (a triad), the old scribbler becomes a true poet, though outwardly remaining the same haggard soul.

Boyish Presumption

The receptivity of the imagination to inspiration (despite human squalor and ignorance) is the precipitant; what might seem like ‘presumption’ to a pragmatic reader is a redemptive disposition toward the real, toward what is ‘powerful’ and ‘eternal’. This agency is less a function of the poet’s free will than it is the Goddess’s. The poem’s deeply presumptuous character becomes clear when we consider one final interpretation of ‘high silk pavilion’: as a metaphor for the vagina.

Sexuality, in the familiar biological, psychological and social catalogues, is obviously not what is at issue here. I would suggest that the uncouth reading of ‘court’ amounts, more or less, to a soldierly joke, perhaps part of the poem’s quixotic attempt to find purity in impurity.

Sardonic irony is very much part of Graves’s poetics, as we see in his many poems where concluding utterance epitomises a point of view antithetical to its literal sense. In his poeticising of the Peng Kun myth, ‘The Pen’g that was a K’un’, published in *Colophon to Love Respelt* (1967), the commonplace finch and sparrow express wonder, and indeed, perhaps indignation, learning that the P’eng can ‘soar to the most Southerly pool of Heaven’, while they can fly ‘only | To yonder elm’. “How can the P’eng outdo us?” the sparrow asks, adding, “Though, indeed, neither started as a fish” (a K’un). The metamorphosis from lowly fish to celestial bird, a change the purebred albeit garden-variety birds cannot achieve or even fathom, since they have merely mundane thoughts, suggests

the transformations in ‘The Face in the Mirror’: the persona’s transformation from battle-scarred fighter to inspired poet, and the poem’s transformation into a proper poem from a medical chart.

I would argue that the vaginal suggestion of ‘high silk pavilion’ is similarly intended to emphasise miraculous transformation. To return to the word, itself, ‘pavilion’ derives from the Middle English *pavilloun*, which descends from the Anglo-Norman *pavilloun*, and the Latin *pāpiliōnem*, a form of *pāpiliō* (butterfly, moth). ‘Pavilion’ is mimetic, deriving from the resemblance of a tent to a butterfly’s wings. The butterfly appears in cultural production – art, literature, dance, music – to symbolise the spirit, a symbolism that can be traced back to ancient Greek where the same word signifies ‘soul’ and ‘butterfly’.²⁴ Having translated the Roman story of Cupid and Psyche in 1950, Graves was almost certainly aware of the tradition eight years later when he composed ‘The Face in the Mirror’. If ‘Alice’ had been in his thoughts at this time (as I believe she was), then so might Psyche have been, whose story he references indirectly in ‘Alice’ by citing Apuleius, and his second-century novel, *The Transformations*.²⁵ We might conjecture that Psyche’s disregard of a taboo against looking at Cupid – the god – informs the visual imagery of ‘The Face in the Mirror’. Just as seeing the god transports Psyche beyond her mortality, gazing at ‘the queen in her high silk pavilion’ – the Goddess – transports Graves beyond his.²⁶

Just as butterfly wings are conventionally associated with the delicacy, lightness and capriciousness of the spirit, the visuality and tactility of butterfly wings are associated with labia; and the relationship of the hood of the tent with the hood over the clitoris. Graves helps this metaphor along by using the modifier ‘silk’, a word with pre-eminent haptic associations. In ‘high silk pavilion’, delicacy of the soaring spirit is conjoined to sexuality or a nuance of sexuality, a union that we might trace in other clear-cut vaginal images in the poem, such as the poem’s rhyme scheme.

The poem’s three stanzas have a quirky though consistent pattern of aabaa, ccbcc, ddbdd. The stanza’s rhyming lines (1, 2, 4, 5) produce one rhyme consistent within the stanza, and the unrhymed line (3) produces one rhyme consistent within the poem. Viewing only the

stanza, the third line ending seems extraneous, but, within the entirety of the poem, it becomes a central structural element, a steady signal throughout the revolutions of the poem. The outer rhyming lines of each stanza (1, 2, 4, 5), enfold the third line, and the greater length and number of syllables in each of these simulate paired labia, while the unrhymed (shorter, and more compact) third line simulates the unique clitoris (or what in 1958 Graves would have understood the clitoris to be, the glans clitoris).

The ‘b’ rhyme (the ‘i’ sound) of each third line (3, 8, 13) also simulates height. Linguists call the ‘i’ sound a close front unrounded vowel, or sometimes a ‘high vowel’, because the tongue is vertically higher in the mouth relative to other vowels. Perhaps we might even unconsciously associate it with elevated speech, or poetry. By coincidence, it also anticipates the ‘i’ in ‘*high silk pavilion*’, wherein of course resides the queen – so with the rhyme scheme, Graves suggests a chain of associations: queen, [clitoris], tongue, poetry. The rhymes in each stanza are also imperfect, and feminine rhymes (‘glaring, drooping, inhering, fighting’, etc.). Graves has the rhymes attend, as it were, upon the central, third, or middle line of each stanza. Moreover, the poem’s division into three stanzas supplies another feminine, as well as a mythological, touch, suggesting the triple Goddess, a complement to the aural implication that the breath of the Goddess enters or is somehow resident within the poem by inspiration, just as the shaving man’s face is resident in the mirror, a reflection of the poet’s glancing presence in the poem.

This latter analogy assumes additional significance when we come to consider that the face of the shaving man is characterised somewhat vaginally, with drooping brow, coarse hair, wrinkled, and ruddy lips. The vaginal attributes of ‘*high silk pavilion*’ are anticipated by the terms Graves uses to characterise the face. Certainly, the sexualised face is part of the pawky humour of the poem – another soldier’s joke – but not an end in itself, obviously.

Let me summarise to this point what should seem an unorthodox reading: the stanzas of the poem are vagina-like in their phonological form and line lengths, and the climax of the poem occurs as the

poet, whose reflection also resembles the outward form of a vagina, apostrophises a symbol that is also vaginal, in a poem that I am claiming to be about the capacity of the imagination to seize and transport the divided self, despite its material and historical flaws, into a timeless realm (*illo tempore*), more solid, more real than the physical (a realm I have compared with Blake's Beulah and Skelton's 'pauylion' of the royal queen of fame).

Doubtless, some readers will accuse me of misreading or deliberately over-reading the images in Graves's poem without respect for authorial intention. That is at loggerheads with my intention. I do not intend to create the text, as Stanley Fish would say, or an alternative text. The three elements I have looked at in this final section of my essay (pavilion / rhymes, rhyme sounds & line lengths / face) contain an improbable though intentional pattern, characteristically Gravesian, which requires theorising and speculation. My speculation is that by representing the body in this singular, forceful, transgressive way, Graves follows a radical notion of reclaiming the body from familiar essentialist readings: from the 'contented autobiography' of Kirkham's reading, among others.

His vision seems to be akin to Blake's 'body of imagination', a term coined, I believe, by Jennifer Davis Michael, who correlates Blake's redemption of the body with his assault upon reason. Michael draws attention to stanza 41 of *Milton, A Poem*:

I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour
To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration
To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration

She writes:

This statement asserts that no specific body is inevitable; that the material forms in which we clothe ourselves are of our own devising. Blake's Milton makes this clear by

preparing not only ‘To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration’, but also to ‘clothe [Albion] with Imagination’ (42.4, 4, E 142). Not only the ‘false body’, in other words, but the true body of imagination is represented as a garment that may be put on or cast off (like the multi-coloured body of the old retainer in ‘A Last Poem’, or Lucius’s ass body). Blake supports this principle in *Milton* by ‘depicting all of nature, and *specifically the human body* [my emphasis], as a work of art, a product of the human imagination that inhabits and subjectively experiences its form’. (p. 120)

Graves’s ‘rotten rags of Memory’ would be the bodily parts described in the poem’s ekphrasis, which are being superseded by the true body of imagination, the poetic, regenerative faculty ecstatically reconfigured as the flower of regeneration transmitted through the physical senses of the poet in the act of creation. The transformations of sky, stanza, and face into vagina, are defining acts of authorial agency. Their eccentricity gathers attention upon their artificiality and plasticity to expose their nature as imaginative reshapings and overwritings much more vividly than if they had been transposed into, say, fruit, flowers, birds, Hershey bars or other conventional euphemisms.

Graves’s willingness to poeticise reproductive organs is well-known. Besides the remarkable priapic line in ‘The White Goddess’, there is the full-frontal ‘Down, Wanton, Down’ (1933), a poem with thematic resonances of the roughly contemporary ‘The Reader Over My Shoulder’. Here the ludic deployment of the male sexual organ, as a ‘thumb’ for example, and as a ‘bombard-captain’, is accompanied by an ingenious use of ravelin to refer to the vagina:

Poor bombard-captain, sworn to reach
The ravelin and effect a breach –
Indifferent what you storm or why,
So be that in the breach you die!²⁷

Elsewhere in his work, Graves assimilates physical features of the text and book object as symbols within the imaginative reality of the narrative, for example, the comma that concludes ‘Leaving the Rest Unsaid’ (1938), which the poem figuratively transforms into ‘a gander’s wing’. In the children’s book he co-created with Maurice Sendak, *The Big Green Book* (1960), the actual large-format green clothbound book in the reader’s hand becomes an analogue of the big green book that propels the narrative forward (and thus it analogises its own narrative episodes to a set of magical spells and reading to magical transformation). The reader’s interpretation of ‘The Magical Picture’ (alternatively published as a children’s poem) becomes an analogue of what each of the characters in the narrative thinks they see when they look in the glass, i.e., an unreliable mental projection. As such, ‘The Magical Picture’ dematerialises the text, while posing a subtle challenge to the objective existence of the reader. By recreating the materiality of the text and the hermeneutical process as metaphors within these works, Graves distresses rationality and empirical categories, i.e., book / text, poem / reading, as authoritative agencies of meaning making, in deference to the imagination as the *topos* of a meta-reality. In ‘The Face in the Mirror’, this metaphorical disembodying stunt opens up an imaginative and conceptual space for readers to engage with the ontological shift of the physical body, beginning with the vagina, from an ontic phenomenon to a conceptual corollary of the poetic. The body becomes, or is revealed as, a work of art (Blake), capable of coded, symbolic expression, and intentionality, not as a passive product of history (i.e., ‘low tackling caused it’); and the ultimate meaning points to the fount of poetic inspiration, the ‘queen in her high silk pavilion’, a generative power that brings the universe into being through an act of spontaneous imaginative valorisation.

In conclusion, in ‘The Face in the Mirror’, through complex and original signalling that involves a reworking of older tropes and invokes literary antecedents and the authority of a romantic tradition of English poetry, Robert Graves addresses themes that have been at the centre of his poetics since the early twenties, namely the

intentionality of poetry, the transcendent power of inspiration, poetic presumption, and the contingency of material actuality. He returns to the trope of the mirror as an act of penetrating self-reflection, in keeping with the physical transcendence and reshaping formulations of the poem. He certainly is not surrendering to the idea that physical decay is deterministic, or merely saluting it for its inspirational powers. Reframing the effects of aging as the faults of history, profane time, he celebrates the agelessness of poetry, the unfathomable wellsprings of inspiration, of inexplicable ecstasy, and if modestly no less importantly, his own unique, hard-earned poetic independence.

Michael Joseph is the editor of *The Robert Graves Review* and one of two North American Vice Presidents of The Robert Graves Society.

NOTES

¹ Typically, Graves looks at the subject of lust from the perspective of his poetic beliefs:

Lust involves a loss of virtue, in the sense of psychic power. Lust is giving away something that belongs to somebody else. I mean the act of love is a metaphor of spiritual togetherness, and if you perform the act of love with someone who means little to you, you're giving away something that belongs to the person you do love or might love. [...] But promiscuity seems forbidden to poets, though I do not grudge it to any nonpoet'.

Robert Graves, ‘Robert Graves: The Art of Poetry, no. 11’, interview by William Fifield & William Buckman, *The Paris Review*, 47 (Summer 1969) <<https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/4178/the-art-of-poetry-no-11-robert-graves>> [accessed 7 June 2020]

² Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (London: Faber, 1948), p. 451.

³ Kenzaburô Ôe wrote, ‘The writer’s job is the job of a clown, the clown who also talks about sorrow’. While Graves might not necessarily see

poetry as a job, or, even in this early period of his life, feel his purpose was that of a clown, it still seems to me that Ōe's light-hearted remark casts a light on the deeper vocational implications of 'Love Without Hope'. Kenzaburō Ōe, 'Kenzaburō Ōe, The Art of Fiction, no. 195', interviewed by Sarah Fay, *Paris Review*, no. 183, (Winter 2007) <<https://www.the parisreview.org/interviews/5816/the-art-of-fiction-no-195-kenzaburo-oe>> [Accessed 5 June 2021]

⁴ Robert Graves, 'The Art of Poetry', interview by William Fifield and William Buckman, *Paris Review*, 49 (Summer 1969) <<https://www.the parisreview.org/interviews/4178/the-art-of-poetry-no-11-robert-graves>> [Accessed 23 May 2021]

⁵ Michael Kirkham, *The Poetry of Robert Graves* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 239.

⁶ Dannie Abse, 'A Meeting with Robert Graves', *Encounter*, 60 (February 1983) 53-55.

⁷ Here one thinks of Laura (Riding) Jackson's notion of the 'I' and the 'I-Thing', the Self and its approximation, its mirror image reflected in the poem in 'Disclaimer of the Person'. Unlike Jackson in that poem, Graves does not ascribe greater ontological weight to the 'I'. 'I' and 'I Thing' are both doubtful entities. The Goddess, or the greater magnitude of poetry, allows him to escape the closed system of self and mirror, and thus to persist as a poet, whereas (Riding) Jackson, insisting on the 'I' does not. See Marta Kmiecik, "Does it seem I... poet-wit? Shame on me then!" Laura (Riding) Jackson's Refusal to Play the Game of Poetry', *Polish Journal for American Studies*, 7 (2013), 35-48.

⁸ 'The Pier-Glass' published in 1921 had a fourth stanza Graves removed in 1938. See editorial note in Robert Graves, *Complete Poems*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward, 3 vols (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), I, pp. 365-66.

⁹ Attributing the characteristic of sullenness or of being 'sullen' to the pier-glass seems to slightly anthropomorphise the glass. The word 'sullen' is likely to mean gloomy or foreboding, although it might also insinuate an obsolete meaning, slow or single, as the 'sullen wave' in Graves's 'Intercession in Late October' (1948).

¹⁰ I may have spent an unreasonable amount of time on this poem, which many consider among Graves's least successful. Nonetheless, see my "Orphans of Poetry": The Poetry of Childhood and the Poetry for Children of Robert Graves', *Book 2.0.*, 6 (2016), 9-20 (pp. 16-19); and "Like Snow in a Dark Night": Exile and Displacement in the Poetics of

Robert Graves', *Book 2.0.*, 8 (2018), 43-60 (pp. 51-54). In the latter work I consider 'The Face in the Mirror' in ways that are compatible with and anticipate my analysis here (pp. 52-54).

¹¹ Orphans, p. 17; Irving Howe, 'Robert Frost: A Momentary Stay', *The New Republic*, 23 March 1963 <<https://newrepublic.com/article/128473/robert-frost-momentary-stay>> [Accessed 26 October 2016]

¹² Graves would have expected readers to get the allusion to Coleridge's water-snakes passage in his own description of 'wainscot rat' and 'starveling spider' (Orphans, p. 18).

¹³ For a note about the importance of reading Graves within the canonical collections and the emerging coherence of the canon, see Frank Kersnowski, 'Robert Graves's Enduring War', *Gravesiana*, 4 (2014), 125-41 (pp. 133-36).

¹⁴ Douglas Day, *Swifter than Reason: The Poetry and Criticism of Robert Graves* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), pp. 30-31.

¹⁵ His *Collected Poems 1938* (London: Cassell, 1938) follows 'End of Play' with 'No More Ghosts', which takes and transfigures an image from the second stanza of 'The Pier-Glass': 'A huge bed of state | Shrouded with rusty curtains drooped awry'.

The patriarchal bed with four posts
Which was a harbourage of ghosts
Is hauled out from the attic glooms
And cut to wholesome furniture for wholesome rooms.

However unexceptional the poem might seem, that Graves thought enough of it to revise sixteen years later, and to highlight it in another poem (which will become the title of a small volume of poems published in 1940) suggests it held some importance in Graves's development.

¹⁶ I attempt a fuller analysis of 'The Magical Picture', concentrating on its epistemological interests, in "Orphans", pp. 14-16.

¹⁷ Robert Graves, *Poetic Unreason* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1968), p. 125.

¹⁸ Alice uses 'queer' seven times in *Through the Looking Glass*, and only one other character, Humpty-Dumpty, uses the word, once; she uses 'queer' twelve times in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and again only one other character uses the word, again once.

¹⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 10.

It is the perception that the myth is exemplary that gives rise to the concept of the ‘re-actualization’ of the primordial, creative era. Insofar as a mythic act is open to imitation, insofar as we can narrate or reenact the events of the mythic era, *illud tempus* is open to re-establishment, we can rediscover and thus reactualize its meaning and its power.

Bryan S. Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 72.

²⁰ The Latin roots of the English ‘presumption’ are entangled with ‘inspiration’. *Praesumptiō* means: 1. A ‘taking beforehand, a using or enjoying in advance anticipation. 2. A taking up and answering in advance, an anticipation; 3. A representing to one’s self beforehand, a conception, supposition, presumption’. Definition of *praesumptiō*, *Numer: The Latinlexicon* <<https://latinlexicon.org/definition.php?p=2047308&p2=p>> [accessed 7 June 2020].

Inspirātiō in Classical poetry meant to breathe in the breath of the muses. A boy’s *praesumptiō* coming in anticipation of conception is the *inspirātiō* of the Muse.

²¹ In *Jerusalem*, Blake speaks also of a tent.

The woven universe is described as a tent created in response to the temporal and spatial realities of eternal life (2: 38; 14-50), and Los has made it clear that ‘there is no Limit of Expansion’ and ‘there is no Limit of Translucence’ (2: 32; 45): those in infinity can ‘Contract or Expand Space at will’ and live, ‘Contracting or Expanding Time’ (3: 55; 44-45). In its finite context in this world of Generation, the shrunken flexibilities of perception range from the ‘Earth’s summits’ of petrified form to the ‘Indefinite Spectre’ of formless space, ‘who is the Rational Power’. This web, woven by the daughters of Albion, thus organises and universalises fertility into unity: ‘Then All the Daughters of Albion became One before Los: even Vala’.

David Whitmarsh-Knight, *William Blake's Jerusalem Explained* (Cambridge: William Blake Press, 2009), p. 359.

²² In the 1930s, Graves concludes every seventh poem with a question, a technique that virtually disappears in the 1940s, when he seems to have ended only one poem out of sixty-four with a question, and roars back in the 1950s, when he ends one poem out of every five (5.41176471) with a question (seventeen for ninety-two poems). In the 1960s, which sees the production of new poems dramatically increase, he ends fifty out of 348 poems with a question, or roughly one in every seven (6.96). However, from 1960-1965, out of 203 poems, sixty-four end on a question, or one in every three (3.17). I am basing my calculations on Robert Graves, *The Complete Poems in One Volume*, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000).

²³ We see the same critical self-evaluation, in 'To Calliope', published in *Poems 1953* (London: Cassell, 1953), which concludes:

No: nothing reads so fresh as I first thought,
 Or as you could wish –
 Yet must I, when far worse is eagerly bought,
 Cry stinking fish?

After 1953, Graves retained 'To Calliope' as an introduction to subsequent volumes of his collected poems up to and including his edition of 1961, which suggests that its importance reached beyond its humorous effect as hyperbolic modesty.

²⁴ Sonia Cavicchioli, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche: An Illustrated History*, trans by Susan Scott (New York: Braziller, 2002), p. 47.

²⁵ The mirror world in 'Alice', 'that lubberland of dream and laughter' (line 34), is 'Where Apuleius pastured his Gold Ass' (line 36).

²⁶ Graves wrote his translation of Apuleius while working on *The White Goddess*, which quotes from a 1566 translation. Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves and The White Goddess, 1940-1985* (London: Orion, 1998), p. 130-136 (p. 130). Although 'The Face in the Mirror' drew on the image of the ghost woman gazing into the broken mirror in 'The Pier-Glass', Graves will surely have been aware of the transformative image in *The Transformations of Lucius*, of Lucius, still in ass form, gazing out over the sea to behold Isis in the image of the moon:

A dazzling full moon was rising from the sea. It is at this secret hour that the Moon-goddess, sole sovereign of mankind, is possessed of her greatest power and majesty. She is the shining deity by whose divine influence not only all beasts, wild and tame, but all inanimate things as well, are invigorated; whose ebbs and flows control the rhythm of all bodies whatsoever, whether in the air, on earth, or below the sea. Of this I was well aware, and therefore resolved to address the visible image of the goddess, imploring her help; for Fortunate seemed at last to have made up her mind that I had suffered enough and to be offering me a hope of release.

Robert Graves. *The Transformations of Lucius otherwise Known as the Golden Ass: A New Translation* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1983), pp. 262-63.

In ‘The Face in the Mirror’, Graves is likening his own awakening as a poet to Lucius’s imminent metamorphosis back into a human shape, which may hint at yet another possible meaning of ‘the face’ in the title, that of the Moon-Goddess.

²⁷ Ben Jonson’s use of ‘ravelin’ cited in the *OED*, in which he declares that John Beaumont’s *Bosworth-Field* needs no reviewer’s defence, suggests a precedent for Graves’s specifically literary usage of the word in ‘Down, Wanton, Down’. Additional internal evidence may be adduced to demonstrate Graves’s use of priapic imagery metaphorically to refer to literary matters:

Will many-gifted Beauty come
Bowing to your bald rule of thumb,
Or Love swear loyalty to your crown?
Be gone, have done! Down, wanton, down!

The carnivalesque trappings of the poem shouldn’t distract readers from the evidence that Graves is chiding himself not for natural inclinations (what would be the point?) but for having the temerity to aspire to transcend his animal nature in poetry, to possess the ‘crown of laurel’, even as such aspiration takes the gross and inconvenient form of a hardon. The earthy, mock-phallogocentric metaphors in ‘Down, Wanton, Down’ overlap with those of ‘Gardener’ (1927), a poem more openly concerned with aesthetic over-reaching, in, for example, the characterisation of the

gardener's 'ass's wit' and 'hairy-belly shrewdness'. The 'bald rule of thumb' used archly in 'Down, Wanton, Down' seems a transposition of that poem's self-critical trope 'the very yard-stick of his own confusion'.

'Have done' in the poem's final line, again nudges us to look deeper for the poem's covert theme. Graves used 'Have done' three years earlier (1930) to reprove the invisible, intrusive reader in 'The Reader Over My Shoulder': 'Know me, have done: I am a proud spirit | And you for ever clay. Have done!' In each poem, the poet reproves the 'clay' on which the poem depends.

Graves valorises the analogy of tumescence and inspiration twenty years later in 'The White Goddess'. The second stanza of this signature poem, following the picture-postcard section, concludes with a mesmerising, erotic description of her whom he would seek ('Whose eyes were blue, with rowan-berry lips, | With hair curled honey-coloured to white hips'). Far from casual description, it is a codified evocation of sexuality: the pairs of consonants moving from soft 'b' to hard 'c', and the sibilant rhyme, possess a powerful, illocutionary force. And the next stanza offers a response: 'Green sap of Spring in the young wood a-stir'. Graves is referring specifically and matter-of-factly to the excited male organ, his own erection. The trope of the Goddess as the life force, she who makes the blood run to harden the male sexual organ, is reinforced by the hardened verse, the twin spondees 'Green sap' and 'young wood'; the analogy between sexual arousal and poetic inspiration is no less astonishing for being hidden in plain view.

In 'The White Goddess', Graves was not writing in the jocose, antic mood he adopts in 'Down, Wanton, Down', where comparable priapic imagery ironizes his poetic presumption – parodied in a highly artificial, Restoration style of writing. And it is presumption of course he lauds, back-handedly, in 'The Face in the Mirror'. While occupying very different registers, 'The White Goddess', and 'Down, Wanton, Down' both unabashedly resort to primal even vulgar imagery to correlate the power of eros and the power of poetry, a parallel treated with greater subtlety and indirection in 'The Face in the Mirror'.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



William Nicholson,
Robert Graves.
Drawing. Graves
Family Collection,
reprinted with their
permission.

The Plague of Modern Scholarship (Theses and Dissertations on the Subject of Robert Graves)

Carl Hahn

In his preface to his 1970 doctoral dissertation on the early poetry of Robert Graves, James McKinley wrote:

Robert Graves has somewhere written, ‘let me suggest that the Ph. D. or D. Phil. Degree – a prerequisite for numerous academic and extra-academic jobs – is the plague of modern scholarship. A doctorate of Philosophy was once earned by successful verbal disputation in some University Hall – a proof that the candidate knew his subject and could hold his own in extempore argument about it. Nowadays, a written thesis on some scholarly subject is demanded. Such theses seldom qualify as useful additions to the corpus of knowledge, being for the most part digests of existing work. Thousands of them clutter the University presses of Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Australia; and who can trouble to sort out the good from the bad?’¹

Adopting McKinley’s bravado, I have presumed to ignore the poet’s counsel and compiled a list of dissertations and theses, as well as other forms of composition offered in fulfilment of academic degree requirements. The earliest work dates to 1933, a doctoral dissertation by Gertrud Paul for a degree at the University of Vienna on contemporary English poets, T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, H. Read, and Robert Graves. The most recent is ‘The Olive as an Emblem of Love and Rootedness in the Work of Robert Graves’, a bachelor’s thesis for the Universitat de les Illes Balears in Palma de Mallorca, 2021. It is the lone work from 2021. They are collectively organised in alphabetical order. In cases where the sources consulted did not

supply information about the degree awarded, I have inserted the phrase: ‘degree not stated’. When available, I provided additional information about the degree.

The *MHRA* requires a standard form for citing theses and dissertations as references, and for a bibliography or works cited at the end of an essay, but not for a comprehensive bibliography. I’ve adapted the reference form but omitted the term ‘unpublished’ to avoid the vexed question of what constitutes publication, a question complicated by the digital environment.

The list can be usefully divided into uneven thirds: the largest comprises works in which Graves is the sole subject; the smallest, works in which Graves is a major subject in study limited to three or four figures; and the final part, works in which Graves is a subordinate unit, either serving as a reference point or a small piece in a larger field of study. In these works, Graves is absent from the title but included in abstracts of the work.

I have not altered the spellings or punctuation within the citation, but strictly followed the original as I found it in the source (see References below). I supplied additional information when available without striving to be consistent. So, for example, the notation ‘dissertation later published as a monograph’ appears with some entries because that information fortuitously appeared in the course of my research, but these surely do not exhaust the universe of published monographs born from dissertations.

Due to the ephemeral nature of student work and the lack of a universal approach to their preservation and access, this list is only as comprehensive as I could make it. If warranted, updates will be made available in subsequent issues of *The Journal of the Robert Graves Society*. Readers with additional information are welcome to contact me at carl@carlrhahn.com.

List

Ackels, Timberly A., ‘Lest We Forget: Exploring Collective Memory in Interwar Britain’ (master’s thesis, Southern Methodist University, 2009).

Adams, Barbara Block, ‘The Enemy Self: The Poetry and Criticism of Laura Riding’ (doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1981).

DISSERTATION LATER PUBLISHED AS MONOGRAPH.

Albrinck, Meg, ‘Crossing No-man’s Land: Gender Confusion and Genre Disruption in British Women’s War Narratives’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin [Madison], 1999).

Almond, Marie-Louise, ““Measure Me by Myself”: Identity, Feminism and Strategies of Resistance in the Work of Laura Riding” (master’s thesis, Nottingham-Trent University, 2006).

Amavi, Ayité Ayi-Koutou, ‘Jésus, Personnage de Roman: Chez Fédor Dostoïevski, Josph Delteil, Robert Graves, et Nikos Kazantzakis’ (doctoral dissertation, Université Paul Valéry [Montpellier], 2005).

Armstrong III, Chelston Lee, ““The Mirror Turn Lamp”: Natural-Supernatural in Yeats’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 2009).

Balentine, James Scott, *Good Night to the Old Gods* for Wood Ensemble (original musical composition for Doctor of Musical Arts, University of Texas at Austin, 1982).

Barker, Alan, ‘The Sacred Muse: A Study of Mythopoeic Theory and Practice of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Queensland, 1982).

Barontini, Francesca, ‘L’unico Tema Poetico: Il Mito Della Dea Bianca Nella Peosia di Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, Università di Macerata, Maserara, Italy, 2002).

Batista, António Pedro Costa Moura, ‘Alguns testemunhos literários de alguns acontecimentos históricos: *Goodbye to all*

That, de Robert Graves, *Carnets de la drôle de guerre*, de Jean-Paul Sartre e *Catalabanza, Quilolo e volta*, de Fernando Assis Pacheco' (master's thesis, Universidade de Lisboa, 2003).

Baukal, Tibor, 'Eros and Psyche: Concurrent Essays in Cultural Critique, Philosophical Anthropology, Historical Reason, Language, Pedagogy and a Science of Human Reality' (master's thesis, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California, 1992).

Bemben, Alicja, 'Robert Graves's Historical Consciousness: A Case in Literary History' (doctoral dissertation, University of Silesia, Katowice, Poland 2018).

Berrahou, Zineb, 'La grande guerre de Ford Madox Ford: De l' histoire à la fiction' ['The Great War of Ford Madox Ford: From History to Fiction'] (doctoral dissertation, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier III, 2016).

Bertran, Vanessa, 'The Majorcan Landscape in the Poetry of Robert Graves' (master's thesis, Université de Paris IV: Paris-Sorbonne, 1996).

Betts, Matthew, 'Poetry, Poetics and Revision: The Early Criticism of Robert Graves, 1922-1925' (doctoral dissertation, University of York, 2007).

Bianco, Kathryn, 'Phonological Foregrounding in Robert Graves's War Poems: A Stylistics Analysis' (honours thesis, University of Malta, 2019).

Bignell, Joy M., 'Robert Graves: Poet and Critic' (master's thesis, University of Western Australia, 1978).

Blackmore, D. H., 'The Poetry of Robert Graves: A Study in Poetic Development and Continuity' (degree not stated, University of Nottingham, 1966).

Bludworth, Rosa Lyon (George), ‘A Study of the Biblical Novel in America, 1940-1949, with a Survey of the Biblical Novel in General in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1955).

GRAVES, CHARLES WILLIAM GORDON AND JOHN OXENHAM.

Boettcher, Ralph Carl, ‘The Romantic Past: Primitivism and Some Novels by Thomas Hardy, D. H. Lawrence, and Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1986).

Boltin, Julia, ““And Take No Closer Look”: A Short Study of Robert Graves’ (undergraduate honors thesis, Kenyon College, 1983).

Bonadonna, Reed Robert, ‘Line of Departure: The War Poetry of Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon’ (master’s thesis, Clark University, 1989).

Booth, Karen Marshall, ‘Shakespeare’s Use of Animal Imagery to Characterize Claudius, Richard III, Edmund, Goneril and Iago as Villains; and Moon Images of the White Goddess in Robert Graves’s Poetry’ (master’s thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1969).

Bounabi, Halima, ‘Portraying First World War Britain Through Robert Graves’s *Goodbye to all That* and Ford Madox Ford’s *Parade’s End* (master’s thesis, University of Mohamed Boudiaf, M’Sila, Algeria, 2017).

Bowers, Willard G., ‘Mind and Myth in the Poetry of Robert Graves: An Essay to Discover the Change in Graves’ Poetic Technique Effected by His Study of the Muse of Poetry in *The White Goddess* (master’s thesis, Temple University, 1963).

Bradnock, Marianne, ‘The Perfect Reader: Edward Ardizzone’s Illustration of the Children’s Poetry of Walter de la Mare, Robert

Graves and James Reeves' (master's thesis, Roehampton University, London, 2012).

Brearton, Frances Elizabeth, 'Creation from Conflict: The Great War in Irish Poetry' (doctoral dissertation, University of Durham, 1998).

Bronn, Johanna Aletta, 'A Testimony of the Misbegotten: Tension and Discord in the Poems of Sylvia Plath with Special Reference to "Poem for a Birthday"' (master's thesis, North-West University, South Africa, 1985).

Brown, Constance A., 'The Literary Aftermath: English Literary Response to the First World War' (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1978).

Bucknell, Katherine C., 'W. H. Auden: The Growth of a Poet's Mind (1922-1933)' (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1987).

TOUCHES ON GRAVES'S INFLUENCE.

Burke, Mark, 'A Critical Edition of the Poems of Robert Graves 1916-1968 in Three Volumes' (doctoral dissertation, Birmingham University, 1969).

Burke, Mark, 'A Stylistic Analysis of Eight Poems by Robert Graves' (degree not stated, University of Birmingham, 1967).

Burns, Albert William, 'Robert Graves and Laura Riding: A Literary Partnership' (doctoral dissertation, Boston University, 1969).

Cakir, Ece, 'Rethinking Utopia as Dystopia: Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* and Robert Graves's *Seven Days in New Crete*' (master's thesis, Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey, 2016).

Cannon, Jean M., ‘Neither Poppy nor Mandragora: The Memorialization of Grief and Grievance in the British Literature of the Great War’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2012).

Carrell, Sharon Kathleen, ““At the Expense of Man”: Robert Graves’s Concept of Women” (master’s thesis, Mississippi State University, 1967).

Carter, Denis Nicholas Giles, ‘The Second Fated’: A Study of the Poetry of Robert Graves, 1914-1947’ (doctoral dissertation, Trinity College, Dublin, 1986).

Christensen, Philip Edward, ‘Remembrances of the Great War: A Comparative Study of Anti-war Classics of E. M. Remarque, Robert Graves and, the War Experiences of Three Modern Historians’ (master’s thesis, Western Washington University, 1990).

Contino, John Martin, ‘Warning to Children’ (musical composition, master’s thesis, Michigan State University, 1981).

Cress, Cecile, ‘A Study of the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, Colorado College, 1964).

Davis, Robert A., ‘The Origin, Evolution, and Function of the Myth of the White Goddess in the Writings of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Stirling, 1987).

Day, Douglas Turner, ‘The Poetry and Criticism of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia, 1962).

Dearing, Mary Susan, ‘Woman and Myth in the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (honors thesis, Brown University, 1966).

DeShazer, Mary Kirk, ‘The Woman Poet and Her Muse: Sources and Images of Female Creativity in the Poetry of H. D., Louise Bogan, May Sarton, and Adrienne Rich’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Oregon, 1982).

Djonaj, Arijeta, ‘Kooperative Lernformen anhnd griechischer Mythologie untersucht und entwickelt’ [‘Cooperative Forms of Learning Examined and Developed on the Basis of Greek Mythology’] (bachelor’s degree thesis, St. Gallen University of Teacher Education, St. Gallen, Gossau, Rorschach, Switzerland, 2015).

Dobernig, Mario, ‘Peggy Glanville-Hicks’ *Nausicaa*: Towards a Performance’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Melbourne, 2014).

Dower, Jr., Richard Graham, ‘Miraculous Love and Dancing Words: A Study of the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1967).

Drake, Nedra H., ‘World War I in the Life and Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, North Texas State University, 1970).

Elder, Emily, ‘World War I Trench Warfare and its Effect on the European Soldier-Writer’ (master’s thesis, Marine Corps Command and Staff College, Quantico, Virginia, 2001).

Fahmy, Rehab Amin, ‘The Myth of the White Goddess in the Late Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, American University in Cairo, 1989).

Fanoele, Victoria Suzanne, ‘Faustian Bargains’ (master’s thesis, California State University, Sacramento, 2010).

Faulkner, Christopher, ‘The “Verbal Iconography” of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1967).

Faúndez, Viveros Ximena, ‘Greek y Edipo Rey: La Recepción Contemporá de un Clásico’ (master’s thesis, Universidad de Chile, 2018).

Firla, Ian, ‘The Narrative Structures of Robert Graves’s Historical Fiction: A Progression Toward a Conception of the Hero in History’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Leicester, 1998).

Forster, Jean-Paul, ‘Robert Graves et la Dualité du Réel’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 1974).

DISSERTATION LATER PUBLISHED AS MONOGRAPH.

Fox-Edele, Nancy, ‘American Athena: A Feminist Sophistic Analysis of the Discourses of Women Servicemembers’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 2020).

Geall, David George, ‘The Development of the Early Poetry and Criticism of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, University of Manchester [UK], 1969).

George, Martha W., ‘The White Goddess in the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (undergraduate honors thesis, Mount Holyoke College, 1964).

Getzug, Maureen Macdonald, ‘Incarnations of the Goddess: Women in the Prose of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, San Diego State University, 1985).

Gilchrist, K. James, ‘World War I and the Early Novels of Evelyn Waugh’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas, 1995).

Graalman, Jr., Robert Edward, ““One Story Only”: Robert Graves and the Poetry of Transfiguration” (doctoral dissertation, University of Tulsa, 1977).

Grace, Jr., Charles Clyde, ‘Mythology as Material for Fiction in Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, University of Florida, 1959).

Graham, Robin, ‘Rite and Ritualism in the Poetry of Robert Graves and W. H. Auden, 1938-1957’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1976).

Habens, Alison Smith, ‘Where Ideas Come From: Towards an Ontology of Inspiration in Creative Writing, with particular reference to Muses of Mythology’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Portsmouth, 2009).

Haislip, John Alpheus, ‘Robert Graves and the Georgians’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 1965).

Hall, Molly Volanth, ‘Ecologies of Materiality and Aesthetics in British Modernist War-time Literature, 1890-1939’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Rhode Island, 2020).

Harrison, William M., ‘Sexuality and Textuality: Writers of Leonard and Virginia Woolf’s Hogarth Press’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Delaware, 1998).

Hart, Alice Gorton, ““Every Poet His Own Aristotle”: A Study of Selected Prose and Poetry of Robert Graves” (master’s thesis, Utah State University, 1969).

Hassan, Ann, ‘Autobiographical Fiction: A Study of Robert Graves’s *Good-Bye to All That* and Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero* (master’s thesis, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2002).

Haylett, Brian Charles, ‘A Critical Study of the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, University of London, 1963-1964).

Hemmings, Robert Henry, “‘Strange Survival’: Sassoon, Trauma and the Second World War’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2002).

Horváth, Tamás, ‘*I, Claudius* and *Goodbye to All That*: The Autobiographies of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, 2007).

Hosfield, Patrick, ‘The Playwright and the Blue Pencil: Analyzing Autobiographical Material in the Forgotten Play of Robert Graves’ (undergraduate study, Harvard University, 2005).

House, Veronica Leigh, “‘Backward to Your Sources’, Sacred Rivers: A Transatlantic Feminist Tradition of Mythic Revision” (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2006).

Hulley, Margaret Sue, ‘A Study on the Influence of Text in Morten Lauridsen’s *Mid-Winter Songs*’ (master’s thesis, Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 1998).

Humphrey, Constance Lynette, ‘*Mōnstrum Ex Machina*: Reading the Artificial Life as Monster in Three Contemporary Western Narratives’ (master’s thesis, Montclair State University, Montclair, New Jersey, 2019).

Jackson, Anna, ‘Religiöse und Weltanschauliche Fragen in Robert Graves’s Romanwerken [Religious and Ideological Questions in Robert Graves’s Novels]’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Vienna, 1950).

Jacobs, Mark, ‘The Primary Vision: A Study of the Works of Laura (Riding) Jackson’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Leicester, 1976).

Jessop, Anett Kristin, ‘Definitional Poetics: Modernist Poetry, Language and the Word Woman’ (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2013).

Johnson, Alyson, ‘Baroque ’n Roll: The Installation’ (master’s thesis, University of New South Wales, 2008).

Jones, Robert Gerald Hamlet, ‘The Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s degree University of Wales, 1957).

Jury, Desiree, ‘History and Myth in the Modern English Historical Novel’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Auckland, 1978).

Karayalcin, Selma, ‘Representations of the Muse in the Writings of Robert Graves: A Study of Five Prose Texts (1944-1950)’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Northampton, 2011).

Kearney, Vanessa Lynn, ‘The “Sacred Feminine” in the Age of Blockbuster’ (doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 2009).

Kennedy, Jane F., ‘An Index to *Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, Catholic University of America, 1967).

Kelly, Dylan, ‘Crisis, Shell-shock, and the Temporality of Trauma: Cultural Memory and the Great War Combat Experience in Owen, Graves, and Barker’ (undergraduate honors thesis, University of Central Florida, 2014).

Kichner, Heather J., ‘Cemetery Plots from Victoria to Verdun: Literary Representations of Epitaph and Burial from the Nineteenth Century Through the Great War’ (doctoral dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, 2008).

Kidner, Terry Ann, ‘The Poetry of Robert Graves’ (degree not stated, Bryn Mawr College, 1963).

Kirkham, Michael C., ‘The Development of the Concept of the White Goddess in the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s degree, University of London, Birkbeck College, 1969).

Klayman, Lyssa Dianne Bossay, ‘Poetry and the Divine: An Examination of Mythic Structure in *Watch the North Wind Rise* and, *Satan in Goray*: The Idea of Disorder (master’s thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1972).

Koh, Tai Ann, ‘Dedicated Poet and Popular Writer: a Critical Study of the Poetry and Historical Novels of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Singapore, 1971).

Kohli, Devindra, ‘The Necessary Trance: Conflict and Liberation in the Poetry and Prose of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Leeds, 1974).

Koike Harue, ‘Unveiling the Muse: The Poetry of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Rochester, 1961).

Kosalka, David, ‘Ghosts of Mythic Pasts: Mythic History in the Works of Friedrich Gundolph, Robert Graves, J. R. R. Tolkien in Light of the First World War’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin [Milwaukee], 2011).

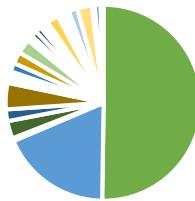
Kotzian, Jürgen, ‘Representation of Class and the Army Officer in Literature of the Great War’ (master’s thesis, University of Vienna, 2013).

GRAVES, SASSOON, AND *GOOD-BYE TO ALL THAT*.

Král, David, ‘Císař Claudius v Beletrie a Filmu [Caesar Claudius in Fiction and Film]’ (master’s thesis, Charles University, Prague, 2019).

Lau, Megan, ‘The Shape of History: Literary Form and the First World War’ (doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University, 2010).

By Country

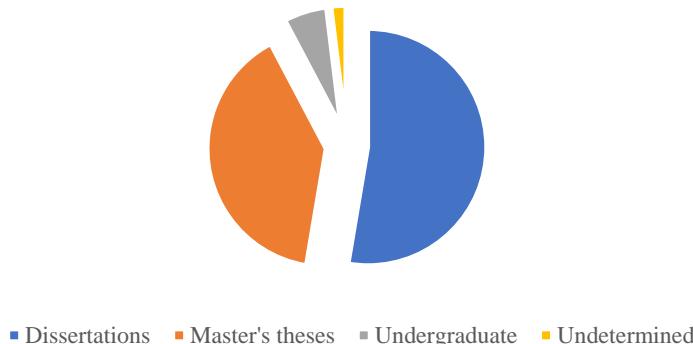


- | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------|
| ■ United States | ■ United Kingdom | ■ Algeria |
| ■ Australia | ■ Austria | ■ Canada |
| ■ Chile | ■ Czech Rep | ■ Denmark |
| ■ Egypt | ■ Finland | ■ France |
| ■ Germany | ■ Hungary | ■ India |
| ■ Ireland | ■ Italy | ■ Lebanon |
| ■ Malta | ■ Netherlands | ■ New Zealand |

Percentages approximate

- | | |
|----|--|
| 99 | United States (50%) |
| 38 | UK (20%) |
| 9 | Canada (4%) |
| 6 | Australia (3%) |
| 5 | Germany, Spain (each 3%) |
| 4 | Austria, New Zealand, France (2%) |
| 3 | Finland, South Africa (each 1%) |
| 2 | Ireland, Italy, Switzerland (1%) |
| 1 | Algeria, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Hungary, India, Lebanon, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey (1%) |

Percentage of Dissertations and Theses



Percentages approximate

- 110 Doctoral dissertations: 52%
- 81 Master's theses: 40%
- 12 Undergraduate: 5%
- 4 Undetermined: 2%

Laurents, Mary Kathleen, ‘The Effect of Collective Identity Formation and Fracture in Britain During the First World War and the Interwar Period’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 2018).

Leadingham, Norma Compton, ‘Propaganda and Poetry during the Great War’ (master’s thesis, East Tennessee State University, 2008).

León, de Betty Anna Rowe, ‘El Subjetivismo en la Poesía de Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1978).

Lewell, Maryanne, ““The Horror of the World”: Reconstructing Trauma and Mourning in the Contemporary First World War

Writings of Pat Baker, Sebastian Faulks and Jane Urquart' (master's thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2004).

Li, Wai Yin, 'The Hidden Voices in Samuel Barber's *Despite and Still*: Robert Graves's Creativity and James Joyce's Originality' (doctoral dissertation (D. music), Indiana University, 2019).

Lyon-Bludsworth, Rosa, 'A Study of the Biblical Novel in America, 1940-1949, with a Survey of the Biblical Novel in General in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' (doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1955).

Madigan, Edward Thomas Maksymillian, 'Anglican Army Chaplains on the Western Front, 1914-1918' (master's thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 2007).

Maibaum, Anja, '*Quo Vadis?* Untersuchungen zur Antike im Historischen Roman' [*Quo Vadis?* Studies of Antiquity in the Historical Novel'] (doctoral dissertation, University of Berlin, 2011).

Malott, Paul, 'The Yet Unsayable: The Limitations of Knowledge in the Poetry of Robert Graves' (doctoral dissertation, Dalhousie University, 1993).

Manchia, Daniela, 'Il Culto della Dea Bianca: The White Goddess of Robert Graves (master's thesis, Università de Sassari, Italy, 2001).

Mangels, Martina, ““The Gospel According to Graves”: Eine Untersuchung von Robert Graves Historischem *King Jesus* im Hinblick auf Seine Quellen und ihre Literarische Verarbeitung [““The Gospel According to Graves”: An Examination of Robert Graves's Historical *King Jesus* with Regard to its Sources and their Literary Processing] (master's thesis, University of Hamburg, 1987).

Martin, Meredith Anne, ‘The Rise and Fall of Meter: Poetic Form and English National Culture, 1880–1920’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 2006).

Martin, Travis L., ‘Identity, Reality and Truth in Memoirs from the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars’ (master’s thesis, Eastern Kentucky University, 2011).

Masopust, Michael Alan, ‘The Nursery and the Trenches: Influences on the Early Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, University of Virginia, 1974).

McKenna, Edward Francis, ‘Live or Die: Unmasking Mythologies of Anne Sexton’s Poetry’ (master’s thesis, Montana State University, 2008).

McKenzie, Laura Elizabeth, ‘Great War, White Goddess and Translation as Catharsis: A Study of Robert Graves and Ted Hughes’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Durham [UK], 2018).

McKinley, James Courtright, ‘The Early Poetry of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri [Columbia], 1970).

Meghdadi, Braham, ‘A Comparative Analysis of Edward Fitzgerald’s and Robert Graves’s Translation[s] of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám*’ (doctoral dissertation, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1970).

Mehoke, James Stephen, ‘The Purpose of Myth in the Work of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1964).

Meister, Gerald Fritz, ‘The White Goddess and the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, 1967).

Merowitz, Emily Anne, “‘An Aggregation of Enormities’: Personal Experience, Narrative, and the First World War in Sassoon, Blunden and Graves’ (master’s thesis, Brown University, 2002).

Mogabert, Marie-Christine, ‘The Influence of Robert Graves’s *The White Goddess* on His Poetry’ (master’s thesis, American University of Beirut, 1981).

Møller, Peter, ‘A White Goddess Unveiled’ (master’s thesis, Syddansk Universitet [University of Southern Denmark], Center for Engelsk, Odesne, Denmark, 2010).

Mortensen, James Kenneth Peter, ‘American Reviews and Criticism of the poetry of Robert Graves During the Period 1916-1965’ (doctoral dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1969).

Moss, Maria, ‘The Sexual Dilemma of the Artist-figure: A Mythological Approach in Two Novels by John Barth’ (master’s thesis, California State University, Northridge, 1974).

Mounic, Anne, ‘Mythe et Littérature’ (doctoral dissertation, Université de la Sorbonne, 1993).

Narayanswamy, D., ‘The White Goddess Myth in the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, Karnatak University, Dharwad, India, 1982).

Nicholson, Chris, ‘The Enduring Wound: Recontextualising *Goodbye to All That*, *The White Goddess* and the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Northampton, 2007).

Northcote-Bade, Carlisle, ‘Robert Graves’s Poetry: An Essay on the Development of “The Single Poetic Theme” in *Poems 1965-1968*’ (master’s thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, 1969).

Nyqvist, Kerttu. ‘Runollisia Ongelmakysymyksiä Robert Gravesin Tuottannossa’ [‘Poetic Problem Questions in Robert Graves’s Works’] (master’s thesis, University of Helsinki, 1952).

O’Keefe, Emily, ‘The Things That Remain: People, Objects, and Anxiety in Thirties British Fiction’ (doctoral dissertation, Loyola University, Chicago, 2012).

Olmsted, Mary, ‘Humor in the Early Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, Columbia University, 1964).

O’Prey, Paul, ‘The Poetry of Robert Graves, 1914-1946’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Bristol, 1993).

Orban, Christopher Robert, ‘Poor Uncle Claudius: Graves’ Use of the Anti-hero in *I, Claudius*’ (master’s thesis, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, 2011).

Osgood, Miles, ‘The World Arena: The Olympic Art Competitions and the Sport of International Literature’ (doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 2019).

STUDY OF WRITERS, MUSICIANS AND ARTISTS WHO HAVE WON OLYMPIC MEDALS.

Palaska, Maria, ‘Female Liminality in Twentieth-Century Mediterranean Literature’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Essex, 2007).

Palmer, Ben, ‘A Discursive Essay on Edwin Muir and Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, University of California, Sacramento, 1970).

Palmer, Max H., ‘Robert Graves and the White Goddess: A Study in Contemporary Paganism’ (master’s thesis, Columbia University, 1954).

Parise, Anthony Giuseppe, ‘The Private Myth in the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin [Madison], 1963).

Paul, Gertrud, ‘Dichtungstheorien Englisher Dichter der Gegenwart: T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, H. Read, Robert Graves’ [‘Theories of Poetry: English Poets of the Present Day: T. S. Eliot, Edith Sitwell, H. Read, Robert Graves’] (doctoral dissertation, University of Vienna, 1933).

Penicka-Smith, Sarah Jane, ‘Reinventing Robert: A Reception History of *The White Goddess*’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Sydney, 2011).

Perry, Sylvia Margaret, ‘Fictional Versions of Jesus Myth in the Modern Period’ (master’s thesis, University of British Columbia, 1974).

Pharo, Jeanette, ‘A Study of Graves’ *The Real David Copperfield* in Comparison with the Original’ (master’s thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1946).

Phinazee, Brian C., ‘Speaking with Ghosts that Rob Graves: Traces of Neurasthenia in Robert Graves’s War Poetry through a Veteran’s Perspective’ (master’s degree, Valdosta State University, 2020).

Presley, John W., ‘The Robert Graves Manuscripts and Letters at Southern Illinois University’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Illinois at Carbondale, 1974).

Probst, Susanna Cornelia, ‘The Return of Persephone: Poetic Renewal in Robert Graves and Ezra Pound’ (master’s thesis, University of Zurich, 1995).

Proodian, Sareene, ‘The Forbidden Zone Writers: Femininity and Anglophone Women Writers of the Great War’ (doctoral dissertation, Marquette University, 2018).

Psilopoulos, Dionysios, ‘A Conspiracy of the Unconscious: Yeats, Crowley, Pound, Graves and the Esoteric Tradition’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1995).

Quigley, Stevenson James. ‘The Demon and the Goddess: Entropy and the Family in the Works of Thomas Pynchon’ (master’s thesis, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, 1997).

Quinn, Patrick J. M., ‘Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon: From Early Poetry to Autobiography’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Warwick, 1988).

Rainer, Gertrud, ‘Robert Graves und sein Verhältnis zur Geschichte’ [‘Robert Graves and His Relationship to History’] (doctoral dissertation, University of Innsbruck, Austria, 1942).

Rand, Thomas W., ‘The Letters of Edith Sitwell to Siegfried Sassoon’ (doctoral dissertation, Washington State University, 1986).

Rebassa Gelabert, Sandra A., ‘Cases-Museu a Mallorca: Estat de la Qüestó: Estudi de Casos [House-Museums of Mallorca: State of the Art: Case Studies]’ (master’s thesis, University of Barcelona, 2015).

Rhoden, Clare Elizabeth, ‘The Purpose of Futility: Leadership in Australian War Narratives’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Melbourne, 2011).

Robinson, Fiona Estelle, ‘Raising the Dead: Writing Lives and Writing Wars in Britain: 1914-1941’ (doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 2012).

Rooksby, Rikky, 'In Her Praise: The Muse Poetry of Robert Graves' (doctoral dissertation University College, Cardiff, 1982).

Ross, Robert Henry, 'Georgian Poetry, 1911-1922' (doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1958).

Rotger Ramis, Marina, 'The Goddess and the Islands: Mythopoetic Aura, Arts and Culture in the Balearics' (bachelor's thesis, Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Mallorca, 2019).

Rotger Viruela, Paola, 'The Olive as an Emblem of Love and Rootedness in the Work of Robert Graves' (bachelor's thesis, Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Mallorca, 2021).

Runyon, Carroll Robbins, Jr., 'A History of Magical Cults and the Rise of NeoPaganism in Southern California' (master's thesis, California State University, Northridge, 1980).

Sailors, Cara Leigh, 'The Function of Mythology and Religion in Greek Society' (master's thesis, East Tennessee State University 2007).

Sarver, Jay William, 'The Production and Re-production of Masculine Subjects in Pat Barker's *Regeneration*' (master's thesis, State University of New York at Binghamton, 2005).

GRAVES, SASSOON, W. H. R. RIVERS, ET AL.

Säuberlich, Katja, Liebespaare aus de Griechischen Mythologie nach itaten von Robert von Ranke Graves [Lovers from Greek Mythology Based on Quotations from Robert von Ranke Graves' (master's thesis, Ruhr-Akademie für Kunst und Design, Schwerte, Germany, 1997).

ILLUSTRATIONS OF MYTHOLOGICAL LOVERS BASED ON *THE GREEK MYTHS*.

Saunders, Penelope Alwilda, 'Robert Graves: A Study of Poetic Language and Imagery in the Evolution of a Personal and a Personal

Faith' (master's thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, 1955).

Schets, Zoë, 'Healing Within Poetry: Expressing and Processing Wartime Trauma in the Early Poetry of Robert Graves' (master's thesis, Ghent University, Netherlands, 2019).

Schöning, Anke, 'Studien zum Historischen Roman: Robert Graves *Wife to Mr. Milton*, *I, Claudius* und *Claudius the God*' (master's thesis, University of Hamburg, 1991).

Seguí Anzar, Juana Maria, 'Robert Graves y Mallorca: Su Narrativa Breve Mallorquina' (doctoral dissertation, Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Mallorca, 2005).

STUDY OF GRAVES'S SHORT STORIES SET IN MALLORCA.

Shepard, Luke Paul, 'The Goddess in Graves and Groves: *The White Goddess* of Robert Graves' (master's thesis, University of Arkansas, 2009).

Simon, Myron, 'The Poetics of Robert Graves: The Relevance of Georgian Poetry to His Early Career' (doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1968).

ED. D.

Slinn, Eunice, 'The White Goddess in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats' (master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 1969).

Sloan, William Barry, 'Robert Graves: The Making of a Poet: A Study of the Poetry of Robert Graves, 1914-1938, with Special Reference to His Poetic Theory and Practice and Some Characteristic Themes' (master of philosophy, University of Southampton, 1977).

Smeds, John, 'Poetic Trance, Muses and Iconography in Robert Graves's Poem "Return of The Goddess"' (master's thesis Åbo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland, 1989).

Smeds, John, ‘Statement and Story: Robert Graves’s Myth-making’ (doctoral dissertation, Åbo Akademi University, Vasa, Finland, 1997).

Smith, Aaron Michael, ‘Clothes for Clio?: Form and History in the 1930s Poetry of Robert Graves, Louis MacNeice and W. H. Auden’ (doctoral dissertation, Queen’s University Belfast, 2015).

Smith, Jimmy Dean, ‘Reconfiguring the Gospel: Jesus in Twentieth Century British Literature’ (doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1995).

Smith, Matthew M. C., ‘Robert Graves and the Welsh Goddess’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Wales, Swansea, 2006).

Sourisseau, Valérie, “‘La déesse’ au XXe siècle: écritures théoriques et poétiques (James Frazer, Jane Harrison, Robert Graves, André Breton, Cesare Pavese, Sylvia Plath)’ [“The Goddess” in the xxth Century: Theoretical and Poetical (Re)writings (James Frazer, Jane Harrison, Robert Graves, André Breton, Cesare Pavese, Sylvia Plath)’] (doctoral dissertation, Université Paris-Sorbonne – Paris IV, 2014).

Spencer, Eleanor Leah, ‘A Wordlife Running from Mind to Mind: Inheritance, Influence and Tradition in the Poetry of Anne Stevenson’ (doctoral dissertation, Durham University, 2012).

Stade, George, ‘Robert Graves on Poetry: 1916-1929’ (doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1965).

Stark, Ruth. ‘Der Historische Roman bei Robert Graves [The Historical Novel of Robert Graves]’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Berlin, 1954).

Starr, Robert, ‘Nailed to the Rolls of Honour, Crucified: Irish Responses to the Great War’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Warwick, 2017).

DISSERTATION LATER PUBLISHED AS MONOGRAPH.

Steedley, Elizabeth, ‘For the Duration: Global War and Satire in England and the United States’ (doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2015).

Steele, Suzanne Marie, ‘The Artist’s Dilemma: Truth, Process and Form in the Great War Narratives of Robert Graves, Mary Borden, and David Jones’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Exeter, 2016).

Steward, Christine June, ‘A Royal Welch Fusilier’s Journey Through Battle Trauma: Mythical, Religious, Celtic Influences in the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, Swansea Metropolitan University, 2011).

Thomas, Lisa, [‘Works’] (Master of Fine Arts in Dance, Hollins University, 2006).

DANCE WORKS: ‘WATER WOMAN WEB’; ‘I’S [SIC] AFOOT’.

Thomas, William David, ‘Textual Critical Edition of the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1980).

Thomas, William David Aitkin, ‘In Search of a Definitive: Some Variorum Problems in the Poetry of Robert Graves to 1948’ (master’s thesis, University of Victoria [Canada], 1975).

Tilbury, Simon John, ‘The Dancer Walking the Ruins: Laura Riding and Dialectical Thought’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2019).

Tourlamain, Moyra Penelope, ‘The Uses of Apocalypse’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Kent, 2019).

Troha, Boris, ‘Robert Graves and Christa Wolf: Alternatives to Patriarchy’ (degree not stated, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2016).

Turner, Merrill, ‘Altered Egos: Counter-histories in Twentieth-century British Biographical Fictions’ (doctoral dissertation, Washington University in St. Louis, 2018).

Utell, Janine Marie, ‘Play for Mortal Stakes: Funerals as Modernist Acts of Fiction’ (doctoral dissertation, City University of New York, 2004).

GRAVES, SORLEY, ROSENBERG, AND THE SITWELLS.

Vane, Sulo, ‘The Emperor Claudius in History and in the Works of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Helsinki, 1972).

Walsh, Jeffrey, ‘The Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, University of Leeds, 1962).

VAR. SPELLING, T. J. WALSH.

Wangsness, Barbara L., ‘A Study of Robert Graves’s Utopian Novel *Watch the North Wind Rise*, in Relation to Past Utopian Writing’ (master’s thesis, University of South Dakota, 1949).

Watson, Janet Sledge Kobrin, ‘Active Service: Gender, Class, and British Representation of the Great War’ (doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 1996).

Weare, Jessica Reid, ‘Competing Narratives: British Memoirs and Fictions of the First World War’ (doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 2011).

Weeks, Jacquilyn, ‘Fairies, Fairy Tales, and the Development of British Poetics’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2011).

Westerman, Molly, ‘Narrating Historians: Crises of Historical Authority in Twentieth-century British Fiction’ (doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2008).

Wet, Betty J. de, ““The Infinitely Variable Theme”: The Poetry of Robert Graves” (master’s thesis, University of South Africa, 1965).

Whitney, Christina Cain, ‘Editorial Collaboration and Control: Laura Riding and the Seizin Press Years’ (doctoral dissertation, University of Denver, 2013).

Wilcoxon, Hardy Culver, ‘The Ambivalence and the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 1984).

Wilson, Carolyn R. C., ‘Writing the War: The Literary Effects of World War One’ (undergraduate honors thesis, Ohio State, 2006).

Wilson, Reed Daniel, ‘Words on a Journey: Vision and Religion in the Poetry of W. S. Merwin’ (doctoral dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1988).

Wiltgen, David, ‘Mythical Imagery in the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, Mankato State University, Mankato, Minnesota, 1966).

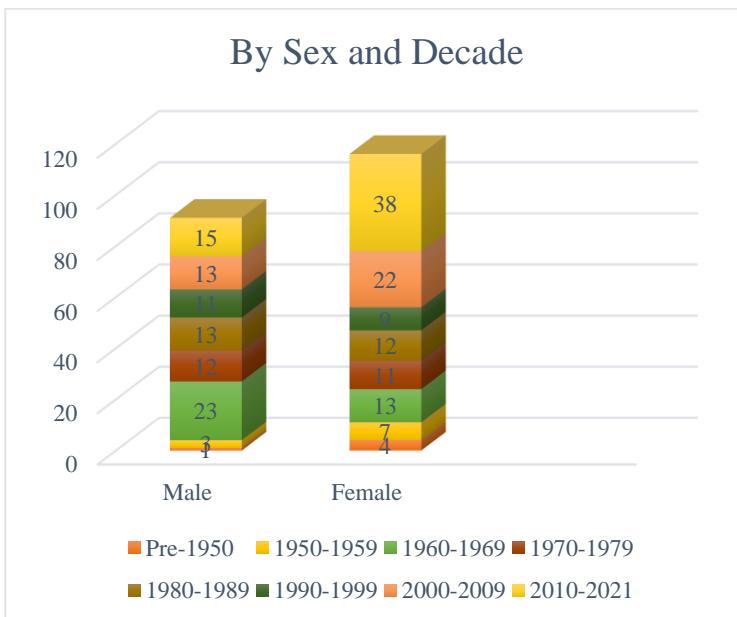
Winebaum, B. V., ‘Robert Graves: Critic and Poet’ (undergraduate honors thesis, Harvard University, 1944).

Winkler, Victoria M., ‘Sufic Images in the Poetry of Robert Graves: The Emergence of the Black Goddess of Wisdom’ (doctoral dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1975).

Witwer, Marian Giddings, ‘The Case of Robert Graves Against the Apollonians’ (master’s thesis, University of Colorado, 1965).

Young, Susan K., ‘Robert Graves: A Twentieth Century Iconoclast’ (honors thesis, Brown University, 1967).

Zankner, Howard, ‘An Introduction to the Poetry of Robert Graves’ (master’s thesis, University of Montana, 1967).



Female: 114

Male: 92

Indeterminate: 1²

References

British Library, *E-Theses Online Service* <<https://ethos.bl.uk>> [accessed 30 August 2020]

Dinkova, Ivanka, *Library Directory – Online Libraries of the World* <<http://www.librarydir.org>> [accessed 21 September 2020]

HathiTrust, *HathiTrust Digital Library* <<https://www.hathitrust.org>> [accessed 30 August 2020]

Library of Congress, *Library* <<https://loc.gov>> [accessed 30 August 2020]

NDLTD, *The Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations* <<http://www.ndltd.org>> [accessed 30 August 2020]

OATD, *Open Access Theses and Dissertations* <<https://oatd.org>> [accessed 30 August 2020]

OCLC, *Worldcat* <<https://www.worldcat.org>> [accessed 30 August 2020]

Proquest, *PQDT Open* <<https://pqdtopen.proquest.com/search.html>> [accessed 30 August 2020]

The Shodhganga@Inflibnet Centre, *Shodhganga: A Reservoir of Indian Theses* <<https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/>> [accessed 10 September 2020]

Carl Hahn is Bibliography Editor of *The Robert Graves Review*. A major collector, last year (2020), he gifted his definitive Graves collection to the University of Roehampton. Currently he is working on a new bibliography of Robert Graves.

NOTES

¹ Robert Graves, ‘Diseases of Scholarship, Classically Considered: A Lecture for Yale University February 13, 1957’, in *5 Pens in Hand* (New York: Doubleday 1958), pp. 81-82.

² This is a gross determination based solely on name. It does not account for how authors self-identify. Names that might apply to both sexes have been assigned the sex for which the name is most commonly associated.



More slowly the sun travels West,
The earth sorrowing knoweth,
How's heart touching tight in his
As it ailed in the shadows.

For the tender and anguish season
The Spring drawing on
Kindles alone in the eye, shaketh
And others she giveth.

Pretty Maid and forget
In employment of chores and food
Your love's boding free.

And others she giveth.



In Spain they are courtiers, in
We seek out the descriptive shade
There he sits to a man;
They are not to a man;

For the summer gives practice again

He sits to a man;

The he sits to a man;

That is to say, the other are

But England is found for her dance

O, we dance when we can,

For the summer gives practice again

He sits to a man;

The he sits to a man;

That is to say, the other are

But England is found for her dance

O, we dance when we can,



We dance in the Spring for desire,
In the Summer for pride,
In Autumn for praise; the wild fire
Of the harvest burns wide.

When the last leaf is cverred, now
The rich crown of the year,

With laughter, with ringing of

White mirth older and newer,

Null verberas am agere in hinc

For his Mollis to share

Then back to the dance marching go

This most fortunate pair.



Here guideth the lord of Mirrads,
Himselfe the master of the host,
Sister, serving me, the
Sister, serving me, the
Food, From the sword of the Saracens,
A and the stony Turkish Knight.

Thes jangos draketh his friend the poet,

He guideth the master of the host,

For a drowsy night more

He would have no more

From the fiery land thither he

Would have no more

From the sword of the Saracens,

New with leading the flower,

From the master of the host.

The Ur-Text to ‘The Country Dance’: An Unrecorded Poem

Carl Hahn and Michael Joseph

Abstract: This note discusses an unrecorded poem, an antecedent of ‘The Country Dance’, and touches on one of its characteristics, suggesting that elements in the poem draw attention to the later poem’s implicit eroticism. The note also comments on Graves’s selective interpretation of the illustration in drawing out a larger theme.

Keywords: word and image, poetry, dance

In its December 1926 issue, *Pears Annual* published an untitled poem by Robert Graves composed in four sections to four colour illustrations signed Kennedy North.¹ The poems and pictures evoked the seasons in terms of dance.² In the spring, Pretty Moll can forget her ‘fidgeting fret’ in the ‘employment of elbows and feet’. ‘Summer gives practice again | To the art we love best’; in Autumn, dancing is done for praise, and at Christmas, the dragon gulps ale and would gladly prolong leaping ‘for a dozen nights more’. The seasons seem to correspond to the stages of maturation: in adolescence, dancing sublimates one’s nervous energy; in early middle-age, dancing has been raised to an art; in late middle-age, one’s dance artistry might win admiration; and in old age, dancing has devolved into carefree leaping.

Graves published a shorter version of the poem ‘The Country Dance’ six months later in *Poems 1914-1926*, consisting of the first of the four sections slightly revised with a revised quatrain from the second section. No illustration appears with the poem but a trace of the original intent lingers there as a headnote, ‘Verses for a Picture’. ‘The Country Dance’ continued in Graves’s canon until

1961, making its last appearance during his lifetime in *Collected Poems* (1961).³

Possibly of interest, ‘The Country Dance’ changes ‘In employment of elbows and feet | your love’s fidgeting fret’ (‘Spring’), to ‘By employment of elbows and feet | The green sickness of love’. The Green Sickness (Hypochromic anaemia) was associated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with girls approaching puberty, and slender women who some believe may have been indulging in a fashionable lassitude. Graves equates the Green Sickness with the disabling melancholy of pubescent yearning, an idea prompted perhaps by the original illustration in which gaily dressed lovers sit beneath a tree while two cupids play what is probably stirring music. One cupid seems even to be tossing them a come-hither glance over his shoulder. Behind the lovers, almost off-stage (in Latin, *ob-scena*) we see the tree-shape echoed in a Maypole dance whose ancient origins are said by some (Hobbes and Freud among them) to involve priapic symbolism, and sacred trees.⁴

It’s possible that Graves intended to emphasise the erotic by titling the poem ‘The Country Dance’, intending an allusion to Shakespeare’s ‘country matters’. We encounter the idea of green spring and young lust in ‘The White Goddess’ written twenty years later, in a couplet relating to poetic inspiration: ‘Green sap in the young wood astir | Will celebrate the Mountain Mother | And every songbird shout a while for her’. The cupids in the original illustration might even suggest songbirds.

The illustrator better known as Stanley North (he adopted “Kennedy” after his marriage to Helen Kennedy), had an interest in folk dancing as contemporary art, and earlier published a book on English folk dancing (1921). According to Sanford Schwartz, North was a colourful and charming character. ‘He liked to take charge of people’s lives and trading on fabricated family connections; he was a bit of a charlatan’.

The inspiration for Graves to write ‘verses for a picture’ probably came from William Nicholson, Graves’s father-in-law. North was a family friend of sorts to William and Edith Nicholson and had written the ‘first significant publication on Nicholson’ in 1923 in

the *Contemporary British Artists* series. (Sanford Schwartz, *William Nicholson*. London: The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2004).

Thanks to Marilynn S. Olson for her help in identifying Stanley North and his relationship to William Nicholson

NOTES

¹ Carl Hahn's catalogue number: C247.1 [*The Country Dance] *Pears' Annual*, 44-45.

² For additional discussion of Graves's composing poems for pictures, see Paul O'Prey's article in this issue: 'Robert Graves's Favourite Poem? The One that Saved his Life' (53-60).

³ See Robert Graves, *The Complete Poems*, 3 vols, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), I, pp. 307, 416.

⁴ One recalls Cleland's references to maypoles for example: 'and now, disengag'd from the shirt, I saw, with wonder and surprise, what? not the play-thing of a boy, not the weapon of a man, but a maypole of so enormous a standard, that had proportions been observ'd, it must have belong'd to a young giant'. John Cleland, *Fanny Hill, or, Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2013), p. 167.

NOTES

Robert Graves Trusts and Related

William Graves, MBE

Abstract: The following essay traces the author's efforts over more than thirty-five years to preserve and make accessible for research and general knowledge the writings of his father, Robert Graves. It provides summary histories of the major institutions devoted to that cause: The Robert Graves Copyright Trust, St John's College Robert Graves Trust, The Robert Graves Society, and the *Fundació Robert Graves*, identifies milestones in their histories and provides related events of importance.

Keywords: cultural preservation, literary societies, literary journals, Robert Graves

The Will

Poet and writer Robert Graves died in 1985. I am his eldest son by his second marriage, one of the two executors named in his Will, and the executor who saw it through probate. The Will was simple: a third went to my mother, Robert's wife Beryl, and the remaining two thirds were divided equally among his six surviving children. (On Beryl's death her third was added to the others, so that all assets from the will would then be shared equally by Robert's six surviving children or, on their deaths, his grandchildren.)

I first looked to Selwyn Jepson for advice. Selwyn was Robert's friend and, in his later years, his trusted advisor. He was an English mystery and detective story and screen writer, who had served as recruiting officer with F Section, Special Operations Executive during the war. Selwyn had collected a set of inscribed first editions of virtually all of Robert's books and these he gave me. The books have been invaluable in the developments I describe below. Selwyn not only gave me excellent advice in those early days: he told me

‘You must build Robert into a Shakespeare, which is how he deserves to be remembered’.

The Robert Graves Copyright Trust

As a geologist (Imperial College, London, 1961), I wanted to continue my professional consulting work, which I enjoyed, and which suited my way of life. After obtaining probate for the Will, I followed Selwyn’s suggestion that, in order to save me headaches and family quarrels, I should set up a Robert Graves Copyright Trust to look after the distribution of royalties from books, and other potential issues. This I did. The Will instructed me as executor to continue using A. P. Watt Ltd as his literary agents, so they now became the Trustees’ agents. Nevertheless, it soon became obvious that literary agents prefer having someone from whom they can seek advice regarding copyrights, problems with publishers, permissions to use poems, and so on, and for which the Trustees did not have the background. So, in my spare time from my geological consulting, I became Robert Graves’s *de facto* literary executor advising both the literary agents (now merged into United Agents LLP), and the Trustees of the Robert Graves Copyright Trust (now Accuro Trustees Jersey Ltd). I have been pro-active as Robert’s literary executor ever since.

St John’s College Robert Graves Trust

As a geologist, and with my somewhat limited literary background, I felt the need for help from academia. St John’s College, Oxford, seemed an obvious choice. Robert had been an undergraduate here after WWI and was later associated with the college when elected Oxford Professor of Poetry (1961-1966). My friend, John Kelly, was Senior Fellow of English at St John’s and was working on Yeats’ letters. And I am an alumnus of the college (after a brief foray into archaeology). With John Kelly’s help, it was agreed that

I could be settlor of the St John's College Robert Graves Trust (SJCRGT). The Trust was duly settled in 1993. Its aims were:

1. To promote the Study of Robert Graves's work;
2. To locate, catalogue and preserve Graves's books, manuscripts;
3. To collect copies of Robert Graves manuscripts in private hands for the sake of safety and preservation;
4. To act as a repository for books, manuscripts, letters and other Gravesiana that might be donated to the Trust;
5. To record publications relating to the life and works of Robert Graves;
6. To help organize and coordinate, from time to time, conferences and events pertaining to the life and work of Robert Graves;
7. To advise the Robert Graves Copyright Trust as and when the situation may arise.

Over time all these aims have directly or indirectly been accomplished by the SJCRGT. The Trust's first move was to offer itself to Robert's friends as a safe home for posterity for their letters from Robert Graves. (Actress Ava Gardner was keeping her letters in a shoe box). As a specifically Robert Graves institution, the Trust soon received some 600 of Graves's letters which now form important and valuable collection.

Proactive in the early days were Dr Patrick Quinn, a Graves scholar, and his then Ph. D. student Ian Firla, who was writing his thesis on Graves. We consulted the University of Reading's recently published (1988) *Location Register of 20th Century English Literary Manuscripts and Letters* to locate Robert's material in various institutions in the UK. However, this was limited in that the major Robert Graves collections were in the USA and Canada. We decided that the Trust's initial project should be to generate a single author world-wide register for Graves, a *Location Register of Robert Graves Manuscripts and Letters*, to include all Graves material world-wide. This would form a starting point for researchers

on Graves and help locate material for theses and also to put together a Complete Letters from Robert Graves, in line with John Kelly's Yeats letters. The only published source of Graves letters at the time was the two-volume *Selected Letters of Robert Graves* edited by Paul O'Prey.

Robert Graves's letters are unique, not only for their time span – 1910 to 1975 – but also for their literary significance. They contain his WWI experiences, his somewhat chequered love life, his influence on many other twentieth-century poets (both through his poetry and through his seminal *The White Goddess*), and running commentaries on his historical novels, translations, and other investigations he had in hand. Robert led a fairly isolated life in Mallorca and virtually all his communication was by letter: these are therefore an excellent record of his life and work. And, because he was a literary figure from his early days in WWI, his recipients tended to keep his letters. The Trust applied for a Leverhulme Grant in 1993 to develop the Location Register of Graves manuscripts and letters but perhaps the time was not right. Unfortunately, the application was turned down and the thrust of interest in Graves went into the Society and Conferences.

Robert Graves Conferences

In July 1995, St John's Robert Graves Trust organized the Robert Graves Centennial Conference, held at the college. This was a celebratory affair, with family and friends. A second conference was organized on a fully academic footing and was held in Palma that November. To coincide with it, I organized an exhibition of Robert's life and work entitled "El Poeta y la Musa" in La Lonja, a spectacular 15th-century gothic civil building on the Palma sea front.

It was during the Palma conference that the delegates decided to set up the Robert Graves Society through which to organise future conferences. These are now generally five-day affairs. 'Special speakers' are invited from among established poets and writers.

The Robert Graves Society celebrated its Fourteenth International Conference in 2018. Conferences occur every two years, now alternating between St John's College and Graves's Mallorca. The 15th conference, which was to have been at St John's in September 2020, was unfortunately cancelled due to Covid-19 and replaced by a Zoom event. The next one will be in Palma in 2022. Other shorter events are also organized.

A. P. Watt Ltd / United Agents LLP, the Carcanet 'Robert Graves Programme', and subsequent Publications

A. P. Watt Ltd had been Robert's literary agents since the 1930s, and I was fortunate in having Linda Shaughnessy looking after the Graves portfolio. With Linda's help, a 'Robert Graves Programme' was started by Michael Schmidt at Carcanet for the Centenary, under the general editorship of Patrick Quinn, with the aim of publishing Robert's complete works. The first titles appeared in 1995 and the last in 2010 in twenty-two double volumes: poetry, novels, essays, mythology, theology, history, and so on. The Programme brought several books back into print as for example, *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* and its short sequel *Jesus in Rome*. The most important addition to the Graves corpus in this Programme was Dunstan Ward and Beryl Graves's exhaustive compilation of *The Complete Poems of Robert Graves* in three volumes, with extensive notes. Penguin Books' *Complete Poems of Robert Graves* is a paperback version of the Carcanet edition, incorporating all three volumes in one, but excluding the notes. Some 1200 poems are collected.

Today, most new editions of Robert's works are now based on the Carcanet texts. Most of his books are now also in e-book form. In the USA, Rosetta Books have some twenty-five e-titles online, and Seven Stories print these in high quality paperbacks. Almost all of Robert's work is in print.

Robert Graves Bibliography

The first bibliography of Robert Graves was published in 1966 by F. H. Higginson, and later updated in 1987 with W. P. Williams. Carl Hahn, one of the early members of the Robert Graves Society, has been a major collector of Graves's published works: there is little which has escaped. His exhaustive collection was offered to St John's but was turned down for lack of space. It now has a special home in the new Roehampton University library. With his extensive familiarity with the publications, Carl has for years been updating the Graves bibliography, including all minor items published in magazines, literary reviews, newspapers, and the like. These minor items have all been scanned and hopefully will be available online one day. The new bibliography, following the Higginson conventions, is planned to be published online by Roehampton University. Higginson's heirs transferred the copyright of the bibliography to The Robert Graves Copyright Trust.

Robert Graves Society and Journal

The Robert Graves Society has had four presidents. Patrick Quinn was the first president; he was followed by Dunstan Ward, Fran Brearton and now Charles Mundye. The first treasurer was Michel Pharand. Patrick Villa, a former member of the British Council, succeeded him in 1998, becoming secretary / treasurer. At the November 1995 Palma centenary conference, it was decided that the Society would publish a journal. *Gravesiana: The Journal of the Robert Graves Society*, appeared in June 1996. Patrick Quinn, who in 1988 had taken over the editorship of *Focus on Robert Graves* (the first journal dedicated to Graves) from Ellsworth Mason, the journal's founder, and enlarged the title to *Focus on Robert Graves and his Contemporaries*, became the first editor of *Gravesiana*. Quinn retired his editorship in 1998, replaced by Ian Firla, who had been the journal's deputy editor. Firla edited the journal from 1998 to 2001, producing the *Millennial Double*

Issue published in that year. John Woodrow Presley then took over as editor, to be succeeded in 2004 by Patrick Villa who produced the next issue of *Gravesiana*, the last to date to be published both in print and online, in Summer 2007. A gap of six years fell between the last issue of volume 2 (2.4) and the first issue of volume 3. Following Villa, Dunstan Ward, then the Society's president assumed editorship in 2008, producing an issue in 2010 and taking the journal online. He served as editor until 2016. Since then, the editor of the journal has been Michael Joseph. In 2020, as noted in the introduction (p. i), *Gravesiana* was renamed *The Robert Graves Review*.

My Other Involvements

On taking on the task of literary executor, I reread almost all of Robert works to get up to speed. I signed book and the occasional film agreements and helped sort out copyright issues on behalf of the Trustees of the Copyright Trust. On the 'literary' side, I published *About War* (1988), a volume of Robert's war poems: poems which he had allowed to go out of print because he could no longer relate to them. Nevertheless, these formed part of his biography as a war-poet and were much read and praised at the time. I felt they should be required reading next to Sassoon, Owen, and the other WWI poets. My compilation of *Poems About War* was not fully satisfactory and has today been replaced by the excellent *Robert Graves, War Poems* edited by Charles Mundye. Three major biographies had already been written or were being completed, and I found that all missed out part of the Mallorca side of the story. So, I wrote *Wild Olives, Life in Majorca with Robert Graves* to set the record straight. It took me a while as I had to learn to write prose rather than geology reports. Published in 1995, it is still in print with over 10,000 copies sold. Beryl read it and approved: 'Yes, that's how it was', she said with a sigh. Some twenty years later, when a good translator could not be found for the new Spanish edition of *The White Goddess*, based on the recently edited version

by Grevel Lindop for the Carcanet Robert Graves Programme, I undertook the translation myself with my wife Elena's help. It has sold over 6000 copies in hardback.

The Beryl Graves Bequest

Beryl died in 2003 bequeathing Robert's 'work library', his manuscripts and his letters to St John's College Library. The bequest, together with the material belonging to the St John's College Robert Graves Trust and several more boxes of later accessions to the collections, gives St John's College the largest (by a factor of ten) and most varied collection of Robert Graves material anywhere. It holds over 15,000 Graves-related items. (The only comparably large collections are housed at the Lilly Library in Southern Illinois, with some 1300 items, and the University of Victoria B. C., with about the same amount.)

Both the Robert Graves 'work-library' and the manuscripts, papers and letters in the 'Beryl Graves Bequest' have been professionally archived by the St John's College Library. These are on-line respectively at <http://www.lib.ox.ac.uk/olis> and <https://archiveshub.jisc.ac.uk/>. Unfortunately, the SJCRGT collection of letters, which were archived by the researchers, is not on the Archives hub and neither are the accessions received after the Bequest. However, everything is recoded and searchable on the websites mentioned below.

The *Fundació* Robert Graves

On Beryl's death in 2003, Robert's house had to be sold. Again, I was involved as executor. I had been considering for some time how to set up a Trust or Foundation to open the La Casa de Robert Graves to the public when Beryl was no longer with us. Fortunately, the Balearic Government jumped in and asked to buy it. They set up The *Fundació* Robert Graves (the Foundation) and took out a loan

to buy the house (now repaid). I am on the board of trustees. The primary aim of the foundation was to open Robert's house to the public. When in 2008 I retired from my geological consulting, the Trustees voted me to be unpaid director. We are now receiving some 6000 visitors a year including some local schools. (When schools visit, I try to be present and welcome them.) In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic considerably suppressed attendance, but visits will build up again when things get back to normal.

Another aim of the Foundation is to raise the Robert Graves profile on the island. So, I ensure that the Foundation helps to host and finance the Robert Graves International Conferences. As mentioned above, these are now celebrated biannually, alternatively in Mallorca and Oxford. The first one hosted by the Foundation coincided with the opening of the house in 2006. Other minor events are also organized by the Foundation. With the loan now repaid, it now rests on a fairly firm financial footing.

The Robert Graves Location Register of Manuscripts and Letters

The STJCRG aims have remained in my mind. So, regarding the Location Register of Manuscripts and Letters, I have presently located and been in touch with some eighty institutions holding Graves material, I have lists of their holdings, and have made good progress with the Register. Recorded on a searchable database are now the locations some 9000 of Robert's letters and some 14,000 letters sent to him, together with the myriad of drafts and final copies of his poems and prose manuscripts. Even his agents' records have been uploaded.

I have been using a pseudo relational-database generated from Excel worksheets, which were then uploaded to the website. However, the data is increasing all the time, so a bespoke online database is now available and being refined to allow easy data input and organisation, and a simple output interface to locate letters, poems, articles, and so on.

Robert Graves Letters Online

With 9000 or so letters from Robert or so presently on the Location Register and only 600 or so published in Paul O’Prey’s *Selected Letters*, I was encouraged to post 270 of Robert’s WWI letters, on a password protected website. The transcription of each letter is shown together with its present library location and details. No images or comments are added. The Robert Graves Copyright Trust owns the copyright to the text of his letters, so we can make them available for research. Researchers can perform digital searches on them and locate the original documents held by the libraries. This database is now being upgraded to take all of Robert’s extant letters.

Other Interests in Robert Graves

Not mentioned above are various Robert Graves related events which reflect the work that the Trust, the Robert Graves Society, and the conferences have done in raising Robert’s profile. The most important ‘profile raiser’ was the BBC’s *I, Claudius*. Options are taken and a new series is about to be made. Of recent events, I personally found the most moving to be the three performances of Jools Scott and Sue Curtis’s *The Cool Web Oratorio*, based on Robert’s war poems, perfumed first in Bath Abbey, then at the Wimbledon Music Festival, and finally as part of the Centenary Armistice Remembrance program at St. Paul’s Cathedral, London. The Robert Graves film *The Laureate* filmed early in 2020 is still to be premiered. All these activities help to keep interest in the work and life of Robert Graves very much alive.

Websites

It will be appreciated that the work by the St John’s College Robert Graves Trust, the Robert Graves Society, the *Fundació Robert Graves*, the Robert Graves Review publications, and my searchable

databases provide much information on Robert Graves, and that these all have a web presence. The original St John's Robert Graves Trust website was housed on a server with the researchers in college and was rather a simple affair. It was updated in around 2006 as *robertgraves.org* with Ian Firla the webmaster. The site, *robertgraves.org*, consists of three sections: Resources, Robert Graves Society, and the Robert Graves Review. Resources deals with the Trust and its work, the finding page for the location register, searchable tables of books, TV, recordings, etc.

When the Foundation was set up in Mallorca, the following two sites were published: *fundacionrobertgraves.org*, a trilingual site (Spanish, Catalan and English) with biography, bibliography and links; and *lacasaderobertgraves.org*. This site simply describes the house and garden and allows visitors to make bookings. The Robert Graves Society has recently decided to upgrade *robertgraves.org* which has become obsolete and incompatible with notepads and smart phones. It is planned that the new site will have news, biography, music, recordings, photographs, teaching resources, Facebook, etc., and a search-engine page to the Robert Graves Location Register. It will have links to the Society and to *The Robert Graves Review*. The Location Register database and the many related tables would be held on a separate site together with the Robert Graves Letters database but accessible through *robertgraves.org*. There will also be an easy access to the Foundation sites.

End Note

As can be appreciated above, virtually all of the objectives of the St John's College Robert Graves Trust have been carried forward. In a future phase, I suggest that a researcher or perhaps two will needed to carry forward my work on the Location Register of Robert Graves manuscripts and letters, and to ensure that the database is as complete as possible. As literary executor, I receive many requests for help, and the Register leads me to easy answers for most queries.

The Robert Graves Letters transcription is a major undertaking. Even before institutions are approached for copies of Robert Graves letters for transcription, there are over a thousand letters in the St John's College collection which require attention. The transcriptions to date (now approaching 1000), reveal one of the most versatile, well-connected, knowledgeable and fascinating poets of the twentieth-century. *Robertgraves.org* is a one-stop site for research into this fascinating and little studied figure.

New biographies are being written, films and TV shows are in the making, all of which raise Robert Graves's profile. Will he become Selwyn Jepson's Shakespeare? Perhaps: they have a lot in common. Time will tell.

William Graves is an author, translator, and geologist. He is the oldest son of Robert Graves and his wife Beryl (Pritchard) Graves, author of *Wild Olives*, *Life in Majorca with Robert Graves*, and translator of *La Diosa Blanco [The White Goddess]*.

Atlantis, Lake Tritonis and Pharos

Oliver D. Smith

Abstract: The following note looks at Robert Graves's casual writings about Atlantis, 1953-1967, foregrounding areas of difference with classical scholars and suggesting sources of influence.

Keywords: Atlantis, Greek myths, Plato, ancient Egypt

Among the many classical subjects in which Robert Graves took an interest during the nineteen-fifties and sixties, the topic of Atlantis showed particular sticking power. Graves first wrote about it in 'What Happened to Atlantis' (1953), devoted several paragraphs to it in 1955 in *The Greek Myths*, and returned to it again fourteen years later in 'The Lost Atlantis' (1967).

The tale of Atlantis enters Western Literature in Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* c. 355 BCE. Plato claims Solon the Athenian lawmaker and poet visited Saïs, Egypt and heard a tale of a sunken island civilisation named Atlantis from temple priests. He began to adapt the tale into a poem, which he never completed. Nevertheless, the details were passed on by word of mouth to Dropides, Solon's relative and friend.¹ In 'What Happened to Atlantis?' and *The Greek Myths*, Graves argues that what the Saitic priests told to Solon was a tale woven together of a flood in western Libya at Lake Tritonis, during the third millennium BCE, and the 'harbour works [...] on the island of Pharos'.²

In the fourth century BCE, Pharos was connected to the mainland of Egypt by the Hepastadion, a 1200-meter-long causeway. In 1916, the French engineer Gaston Jondet discovered evidence of a submerged harbour adjacent to Pharos, suggesting the island was once larger.³ Jondet dated this harbour to the time of Ramesses II (thirteenth-century BCE). Graves proposed that the ruins of Jondet's

harbour could have been basis for the sunken island civilisation described by Plato. In this etymology, Graves may have been influenced by Spyridon Marinatos an archaeologist whose paper in *Cretica Chronica* (1950) also argued that Saitic priests had conflated separate events.⁴ But Graves disregarded Marinatos's theory that linked Atlantis to the volcanic destruction of the island Thera (What Happened, p. 74).

More than a decade after *The Greek Myths*, Graves returned to the subject in 'The Lost Atlantis' (1967), disputing an Aegean location for the lost island.⁵ In the 1960s, the notion that Thera (Crete) was Atlantis became current among laypersons and was supported by Angelos Galanopoulos, a seismologist whose work (largely based on Marinatos) was familiar to Graves (*Crane Bag*, pp. 69-70). While Graves rejected the Aegean location, he speculated that the harbour on Pharos may have been built by the seafaring Minoans (*Greek Myths*, p. 142), and thus served as the source for the descriptions of Minoan Crete that coloured Plato's description (p. 143). He also sourced Plato's account of Atlantis's mountainous coastline to the coastline of Crete, which he claims the Egyptians had amalgamated into the story, although noting, 'they would have gained knowledge of it only through hearsay' for of their fear of water travel (p. 144).

Oliver D. Smith is an independent researcher from England with a background in classics. He studied B. A. Classical Civilisation at University of Roehampton and PG Cert Classical Studies at Open University.

NOTES

¹ See Plato, *Timaeus*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, trans. by W. R. M. Lamb, 12 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd. 1925), IX, 20e and 21c-d.

² Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 142; see also Robert Graves, 'What Happened to Atlantis', *Atlantic* (October 1953), 71-74.

³ Gaston Jondet, *Les ports submergés de l'ancienne île de Pharos, Mémoires présentés à l'Institut Égyptien et publiés sous les auspices de Sa Hautesse Hussein Kamel, Sultan d'Égypte* (Cairo: l'Institut Égyptien, 1916), IX.

⁴ Spyridon Marinatos, ‘On the Atlantis Legend’, *Cretica Chronica*, 4 (1950), 195–213.

⁵ Graves republished the essay two years later in *The Crane Bag*. Robert Graves, ‘The Lost Atlantis’, in *The Crane Bag and Other Disputed Subjects* (London: Cassell, 1969), pp. 68–74.

POEMS

Michael Longley

DARTFORD WARBLER

It arrived in the post
In answer to my poems,
Jeff's sparky portrait
Of this rarest bird,
A Dartford warbler
Among gorse blossom,
Once only in my life
Glimpsed in Picardy
Where the Downs continue,
When I stood at the poet's
Grave and asked myself
Had Edward seen it too.

Michael Longley

PLOVERS

I

An anonymous Tommy
On the first day of the Somme
Guarded for half an hour,
For an eternity,
A plover's nest, to protect
The eggs from being trampled,
The rainbird's eggs.

II

Under heavy fire the plover that pretends
A broken wing dies of a broken wing.

Ruth Fainlight

SHE BE ME

—with acknowledgments to Jamie McKendrick

When I arranged a meeting with my self
predictably *she* — as I'll call her — turned up late.

I had sat an hour at a table and drained
three cups of coffee when she wafted in,

looking like me with a better haircut, younger,
with an insouciant air and the feeblest excuse.

The waiter I'd flirted with to no avail
as the place emptied was suddenly all smiles.

I offered her lunch as it was clear
she had no money, nor plan for the future

— none of which I myself had that much of
but at least I'd arrived on time, time being

what I had less of, which made her lateness
even worse. I could tell she didn't know

what she wanted — to drink, to have, to be.
A vaguely startled look blurred her eyes

as if her confidence was just a bluff.
I could have told her that what lay ahead

would test a sturdier nerve than hers
but why waste words – she'd find out soon enough.

All the fool seemed utterly sure of
was never in her life would she be me.

Grevel Lindop

A FAREWELL

I walked in the long colonnade of dreams
and she swam up from a depth of blue-green water:
light mottling the pale skin of her arms
and hair like branching coral over her shoulder.
I waited on that pavement of white jasper
for what message she might have to deliver.
Our eyes met, and nothing could be clearer:
she had come to say that she had been my muse,
and now she was leaving. These words are my tears.

Grevel Lindop

SCRIMSHAW

I do this one thing that is not of use.
Some dark hours below deck are all I own,
congealed to lampblack and tobacco juice:
it is the Arctic night inscribes the bone.

By day the whales are hunted, chained and flayed.
My little ship, tight nest of clean-drawn lines,
sails on a different truth I also need
to where a mermaid on her rock reclines:

though scratched on whalebone, she can have no share
in flensing-knives, blood, blubber or baleen.
Her mirror shows no face. She combs her hair
and sings to someone I might once have been.

Grevel Lindop

THE WITCH BOTTLE

Glass flask, height 105mm, sealed with a cork and wax, on display in the Pitt Rivers Museum [...] collected in 1915 by Margaret Murray, Egyptologist and writer on paganism, from ‘an old lady [...] near Hove’, E. Sussex. Reputedly she told Murray, ‘They do say there be a witch in it, and if you let un out there’ll be a peck o’ trouble’. – *British Archaeology*, 108 (September / October 2009), p. 11.

I was the valley’s Goddess long before
the wooden Christ was hung with outstretched arms
over these plots carved from the stubborn moor,
his cross on parchment parcelling out the farms.
And girls still opened secrets at my spring,
the old ones’ murmur settled by my stone:
unasked, they gave the Christ child for my nurseling,
and my blue mantle lapped him for my own.
But blackrobed preachers killed their faith with fear.
Starved of belief, I dwindled to a wraith;
one falsely in God’s name confined me here,
struggling inside blue glass, deprived of breath.
Man, lift the stone. Under your threshold, see –
my gentle heart still beats. Now: set me free.

Paul O'Prey

THE GRIEVING SAINT

This was deep harbour once,
before it silted up
and the Old Man took to drink.

Twice a week small ships
nosed their way between the rocks,
into the tiny dock.

He, the pilot, and the skipper,
were always first ashore,
first to the Anchor Bar.

They said you couldn't move on the quay
that night the lifeboat came back
with a dead Polish sailor.

The coxswain searched his pockets
and brandished a bent tin saint,
the carried child rubbed away to nothing –

Christopher's trust, lost to lonely watches
on a thrashing sea, the Atlantic night,
each dark wave an opening grave.

The priest knelt down and pressed
the grieving saint into the dead man's hand,
and sent them both on their way.

Paul O'Prey

THE NIGHT-COCKLERS

My father, his father, and the Old Man himself
– it took all three to shunt their yawl to this low ridge
and run her down the bank of plank and shingle.

Dead of night, bitter cold and always wind enough
to take them up beyond the Water Rocks,
lost to any call or help.

The kid was prone to sleep,
for which a faceful of Irish Sea
was the Old Man's cure.

They spilled their lines and waited
for the tug of cod, ling, bass, sole.
Mackerel they gave away, or bartered for a pint of mild.

In another century, I wander up the strand at night
to watch the village men go cockling,
far out on the low-tide mud.

Bowed, silent, hardly moving, moonlight on their backs
and the sea-line breaking white behind,
they could be bards or druids, pleading with the tide.

On the shore-road the gang-master looks me up and down,
slams the van door shut, and tells me to fuck-off.
Scared I'm from the social.

And it's easy to leave. A hired car, a smart hotel
up on the lough, the promise of good whiskey.
Enough of ghosts, and staring at vast waters.

Linda Morales Caballero

PAS DE DEUX

I cannot get over the image of your body
naked, sturdy, milk-coloured,
your hand reaching out to me from the frontier of the other
stretcher...

A glimpse of your solid forms in chiaroscuro,
the taste of your hand blindly crossing the stage...
are still a recollection, quiet, vivid,
of an improvised “pas de deux”.

Those ghostly shadows that worked
a new, painful memory into my body
have not effaced the beauty of the moment,
the shared tenderness,
your portrayal, so lovingly recognized and desired.

Linda Morales Caballero

SO MUCH

We left our skin
in the whirlwind of each encounter,
in the perforated pores
of our bodies, at the very touch
of our wounding desires.

To risk our necks under these circumstances
calls for study
guilt and scruples,
moans scrutinized under a magnifying glass.

Your mouth fills with your blood
when you moonset in me,
and nothing again will ever be possible
now that you are a puddle of what you were,
the one drowned by your own acts.

I will no longer pull you out from the narrow creases
of spiderwebs, or from rivers or skyscrapers.
I will not, even, keep kicking you along the cliff edge!
How lonely we have become
from so much staring at each other!

Linda Morales Caballero

VISIT

To look at you today has been
like seeing you and seeing me
in a mirror.

Your ironed out forehead
of a modern Martian
has left me with serious doubts
about reality.

To receive your kiss on my hand
to kiss you back on the cheek
seemed anthropological rituals
of a species long extinct.

You swapped your landscape
for mine;
you offered me, in your intoxicating coffee,
the arrogant bacteria
of your laughter.

Everything by your side is magical,
unreal, playful,
even I, submerged in my black dress,
feel adhered
to your tongue
like a stamp.

— Poems by Linda Morales Caballero translated from the Spanish
by the author and Lucia Graves.

Sean O'Brien

FLYING THE FLAG

The pollarded Bramley appears
in a flourish of frost and fog
that will survive the morning
as the moon retires slowly, going,
gone in the blue of beyond,
and low-voiced old couples, out for the sun
with the grandbairns, in secret, stop
by the railings once more to consider
our half-filled bath, the cabbage-stumps
and desiccated artichokes, the kale-bed
cleared for planting. Should summer
come at last, there'll be enough to share.
Till then, the evermoreish smell
of someone's bonfire in a dustbin,
mitigated with a cowl, against the law
the gardeners wink at. Let it burn.
Let the allotment manifest
a green benevolent untidiness
where time runs quietly away.

When the Union Jack was run up
under cover of darkness
on New Year's Day, it seemed
a secret triumph had occurred,
and with it came the right to claim
this tiny pastoral republic
for a colony, because why not.
The patriot's a neighbour

I've been glad to share a pint with
on and off for thirty years.
He has his reasons, he declares,
yet cannot name them.

Raspberry canes, and the lines of rigging
runner beans will climb into the sun,
courgettes and spuds and pomodoro,
sweet peas in due season, green apples
to reclaim the butchered tree: all these
survive the poison, but the knowing
has no cure. And I am sick and tired now
of loud and sentimental people
who never know quite what to put,
who cannot tell *A* from a bull's left foot
but will put something anyway, any old how,
then afterwards can't understand
what all the fuss has been about, and think
it must be personal. It is.

Sean O'Brien

STAR OF BETHLEHEM

Your pilgrimage is halted here
beside the path, beneath the storm
that would uproot you:

far too few, and none to spare,
but times are evil: now the tiny
candour of your stars must be enough.

POETS IN THIS ISSUE:

Linda Morales Caballero's most recent books include *Simmering Karma / Karma a fuego lento* (DarkLight Poetry, 2021) and *El rumor de las cosas* (Nueva York Poetry Press, 2020). She is also a short story writer.

Ruth Fainlight's most recent collection *Somewhere Else Entirely* (2018) was published by Bloodaxe Books. *Alan Sillitoe: Selected Poems Chosen by Ruth Fainlight* (2020) was published by Dare-Gale Press.

Grevel Lindop's books include *Luna Park* (2015) and *Playing with Fire* (2006). He is also a critic, travel writer, biographer, and the author of *Charles Williams: The Third Inkling* (2015).

Michael Longley, CBE, is a former Ireland Professor of Poetry. Recent additions to his extensive bibliography include *Homer's Octopus* (2020) and *The Candle Light Master* (2020). In 2013, he compiled *Robert Graves: Selected Poems*.

Sean O'Brien's most recent book of poetry, *It Says Here*, was published by Picador in 2020. He is also a critic, playwright, novelist, and Fellow of the UK's Royal Society of Literature.

Paul O'Prey's most recent book of poems *Fleet* (Melos Press, 2021) traces the course of London's buried river. He is also an anthologist, translator and scholar. Other works include two anthologies of war poetry, two volumes of Robert Graves's *Selected Letters* (Hutchinson), his *Selected Poems* (Penguin), and his *Collected Writings on Poetry* (Carcanet).

Submissions:

The editors of *The Robert Graves Review* will consider scholarly articles on all aspects of the work and life of Robert Graves, as well as original poetry, and book reviews. Article lengths vary and should be appropriate to the topic. *The Review* will also publish short notes highlighting some area of interest at the sole discretion of the editor and are not peer reviewed. We will not consider work that is under submission elsewhere or that has been published previously. *The Robert Graves Review* uses a double-anonymous evaluation system: we will not share the identity of the author with the readers, nor the readers' identities with the author. The journal charges no fees for the authors. Please send completed essays by e-mail attachment in Microsoft Word or Rich Text Format to: Michael Joseph at mjoseph@rutgers.edu.

Requirements:

Articles submitted for publication should be a reasonable length. Articles and book reviews should conform to the Modern Humanities Research Association's *Style Guide: A Handbook for Authors and Editors*, available at <http://www.mhra.org.uk/style/>. Please consult current and past issues for guidance.

All the issues of the journal and its forerunners as well as more information can be found at: *The Robert Graves Review* website.

