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Covert art – Abstracted detail of *Nice 1* (2011) by Karen Guancione, photograph by Bruce Riccetelli.

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Introduction

Michael Joseph

This second issue of *The Robert Graves Review* begins with a quartet of critical studies. In ‘A Brief Foray into Nonsense by Way of Robert Graves’s *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children*’, Joseph T. Thomas Jr. examines this late selection of early poems through the lens of Wim Tiggess’s nonsense theory, providing close readings of ‘Dicky’ and ‘Vain and Careless’, originally published in 1920, and ‘The Six Badgers’, new to this (1960) edition. Rehearsing Tiggess’s idea that nonsense falls on a spectrum between sense and gibberish, and that the tension between these binaries produces ‘pure’ nonsense, Thomas posits that sense in Graves’s nonsense poetry derives from the poetry’s formal qualities, which dynamically interact with the incoherence or instability of the text. He references another binary to contrast ‘literary nonsense’ with other artistic idioms. The quintessence of literary nonsense is found in the tension created by playfully indeterminate over-abundance (or lack) of meaning balanced with a sense of order, design, semiotic satisfaction, and clear teleology. Without that sense of sense, countered neatly with the non-sensical, one approaches something akin to the complexity of Dada on one end and simple light verse on the other.

Whimsical, fanciful, and light-hearted though they may seem, in this regard, Graves’s poems for children are not ‘light verse’. And Thomas probes Graves’s nonsense to find a unique ‘construction’ of childhood [that is] more mysterious [...] than that held by many of his contemporaries’ and, most interestingly, more than ‘that held by many of our contemporaries’.

In addition to other nonsense scholars Michael Heyman and Kevin Shortsleeve, Thomas’s work draws on ‘Poetic Nonsense: Robert Graves, The White Goddess and Children’s Poetry’, my first article for the precursor of this journal, *Gravesiana* 3 (2013). But Thomas’s incisive and dexterous interpretations are distinctly and recognizably (and I should add inimitably) his own.¹

Although ghosts are often regarded as nonsense, Richard Carder takes them very seriously – as did Graves. Playing on Graves’s name to suggest facetiously a certain inevitability, a nominal incompatibilism loose in the cosmos, Carder’s ‘Graves, Ghosts, Madness, Magic & Religion’ plaits together several intuitively related themes in Graves’s work. The first part of his essay considers how the different usages and resonances of the word ‘ghost’ in Graves’s poems up to his 1940 collection, ‘No More Ghosts’ reveal different aspects of Graves’s beliefs and psychology. After a brief consideration of madness (the state closely akin to PTSD in which one might see a ghost) and sanity (not necessarily its opposite), the essay entertains a discussion of the paranormal or the surfacing of psychic phenomena in consensual reality. For this section, Carder includes excerpts from his protracted correspondence with Graves, which began in 1967 and ended in 1972. He points out that Graves not only published several books with Creative Age in the nineteen forties, but befriended its owner, Elizabeth Garrett, a noted psychic: ‘they got on like two oysters on a plate’; and asserts that Graves ‘habitually’ drew on psychic energies, citing as one example his frequent invocations of St Antony of Padua to help him locate lost objects. As Graves explains to Carder, ‘What all this means really is I suppose a “magical” means of focusing one’s attention on circumstances [...]. In scientific terms it is 5th dimensional thinking’.

Graves’s ‘psychic energies’ can be understood, writes Carder, by comparison with ‘remote viewing’, the practice of gaining accurate impressions or knowledge about a subject distant in space and / or time – a phenomenon taken quite seriously in certain quarters such as the US armed forces. Locating Graves’s thinking outside the mainstream of the Western Rationalist Tradition, Carder cites his collaboration in the nineteen-sixties with the Shah brothers, a topic pursued in Sara Greaves’s essay, ‘Robert Graves’s Mythopoetic Hospitality: Translating *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayaam*’.

According to Greaves, Graves engaged in this collaboration to further his own interests in Sufism; the Shahs’ conception of Khayaam as a Sufi perfectly aligned with his own mythopoetics. Therefore, ultimately, the poem owed a great deal to Graves’s

own thought and life experience. Just as she turns away from the popular notion that Graves served as an unwitting accomplice to a fraud, Greaves rejects the general low opinion about the quality of the poetry in his translation, writing, ‘it seems sad that the beauty of some of these quatrains should have been so overshadowed by the controversy of the non-existent manuscript’. The controversy over the authenticity of the alleged manuscript and the originality of Graves’s poetic form weighs heavily on the narrative of Graves’s public life and reputation and yet, interestingly – one must ponder the idea – Greaves speculates that ‘this controversy may have seemed to Graves almost a petty irrelevance’.

In the concluding section of her essay, Greaves delivers on the argument teed up in her title, the Rubaiyyat translation reveals a ‘mythopoetic hospitality’ in Graves: a primal state or a ‘new space’ congruent at key points with the ‘Eastern philosophies and esoteric communities’ (again echoing ideas asserted by Richard Carder). Her discussion of hospitality is informed by a specialized sense of the word shared by several theorists including Claude Raffestin, Henri Meschonnic, and Antoine Berman who declare ‘that translation [itself] amounts to a form of hospitality’.

The quartet concludes with an essay having only an inferential connection with Robert Graves: Faith Ellington’s readings of the under-regarded war poetry of women writing during the First World War, which she interprets through the writings of Gothic literary theorists. “‘Like a Ghost at the Door’: Women’s World War I Poetry and a Gothic Home Front’ systematically reviews aspects of the Gothic and more particularly the Female Gothic as exemplified in stanzas by a number of skilled poets, Teresa Hooley, Anna Gordon Keown, May Wedderburn Cannan, Nora Griffiths, Helen Dircks, Margaret Sackville, Helen Hamilton and Dame Edith Sitwell. She observes that it may be more meaningful to think more broadly of the haunted houses that reoccur in these poems in terms of a haunted home front, and to conclude that the pervasiveness of loss and trauma made the home front experience like that of the battlefield, effectively erasing the ‘clean division between safety and danger, between home front and front lines’. While Ellington’s essay doesn’t

specifically bend toward a reconsideration of the ghosts that populate chapters in *Good-Bye to All That* or Graves's war poetry, it does provide us with a perspective from which to make new meanings from them. Ellington's Gothic thus revisits Carder's ghosts while it subtly revises Graves's hauntings just as Thomas's 'Nonsense' revises Graves's penny fiddling.

By the way, as we have done previously, we would like to point out that Faith Ellington is currently a graduate student, studying at Louisiana State University, and to wish her well on what we expect will be a long, productive literary career.

Following Critical Studies, a Biography section new to *The Robert Graves Review* offers two exciting pieces. The first, an abridged essay by Vivian Holzer Rozental, recounts Graves's visit to Mexico where he would read *Antorcha y Corona, 1968*, at the summer Olympics (XIX). Fresh out of Bryn Mawr College, Holzer found herself appointed to organize a poetry symposium, one of nineteen cultural programs the Mexican government planned to host in connection with the games.

And Graves was the first of the eleven poets she was to organize. The essay begins as she sees him step off the plane:

He seemed aloof and absent minded, attracting attention because of his unusual and picturesque attire. He was very tall, wore shabby clothes and hid his messed-up curly silver hair under a broad-brimmed cordovan hat that covered his brow. His piercing grey eyes wandered through the crowd aimlessly. The crooked nose allowed me to unmistakably identify him as 'my poet'.

Holzer details her experience chaperoning Graves in and around Mexico City, which intensified when public response to the Tlatelolco Massacre forced President Díaz Ordaz to cancel the Symposium, and other poets bailed. She walks through their itinerary, including cultural visits to the pyramids of Teotihuacan, and a late sixteenth-century monastery (Graves, she remarks, was uninterested in the gilded altar but considerably taken by the small courtyard vegetable

garden), their efforts to set up poetry readings among the local poets as a consolation for the cancelled symposium, and their convivial meals at her parents' home. At one of these, Graves encounters Dr George Rosenkranz, an organic chemist whose pioneering work on yams and the related *barbasco* led to the discovery of the first combined oral contraceptive pill ('the pill') – a development Graves wholeheartedly approves.

Tossed together for a week, the aging poet and the college grad became fast friends. When Graves returned to Mallorca, they struck up a correspondence that lasted into the mid-seventies, and met in Mallorca and London. As well as chat about light topics such as owls (the Bryn Mawr symbol) and medals, their conversations touch on issues of moment to Graves scholars, remembered by the author with great clarity and detail. For example:

Robert wanted to experiment with mushrooms himself and felt authorized to do so as a poet. He had already revealed his desire in Mexico when we first met because he had heard of a mushroom in Oaxaca that had the same properties as Dionysius. He was convinced both species could get him to the gates of paradise, and he wanted to pass through during his lifetime, especially since his health was deteriorating and entering that unknown dimension was vital for him.

And ...

He had encountered other muses before, but, with the passage of time, had eventually felt betrayed by them. He despised their unfaithfulness and their lack of total commitment. Even with Laura Riding, the woman who had had the most influence in his young life, love had come to an end. Deep disappointment and suffering had followed, and he was forced to set her aside. He remained loyal to his former muses, showing them generosity, but they were no longer his source of inspiration. They had fulfilled their role; their virtues were lost, and the poet had to carry on.

The second biographical piece flows from the work of The Robert Graves Oral History Project,² an edited and annotated abridgement of an extended interview conducted with William Graves, elaborating on many of William's recollections of his father published in *Wild Olives: Life in Mallorca with Robert Graves* (1995).

Following on from Biography are shorter and more narrowly focused biographical narratives highlighting specific texts, beginning with brief accounts of two ephemeral texts previously hidden from Graves scholars. The first of these, 'A Previously Uncredited Letter', regards a letter published in *The Sunday Times* on 6 June 1937 over the name Alan Hodge that research shows Graves wrote. This essay contextualizes the letter and Graves's reasons, stated and unstated, for inviting Hodge to stand in as author. The verses in 'Verses for Margaret Russell' refer to a poetic inscription Graves penned in an autograph book belonging to Margaret Russell, who twenty years earlier had been nanny to his daughter Jenny (1919-1921). As well as transcribing the poem, this note chronicles the friendship that grew up between Russell and 'The Captain' and lasted over forty years.

'Derick Boothby's *White Goddess*', written by the book collector and Graves enthusiast Steven Michael Stroud, is one of those rare bibliographical essays that take a deep dive into the provenance of a single volume. Stroud begins by describing his excitement at having purchased over the internet from a reputable dealer a 'signed copy' of the Faber paperback edition of *The White Goddess*, which he discovers to be bound 'like a family bible' in black Morocco leather. He then relates how documents not disclosed in the bookdealer's description tumbled from the book: a letter from William Graves to a former owner (regarding the identities of the mysterious 'Derick and Rosalie', the previous owners), and, more astonishingly, a holograph note to 'Derick and Rosalie' from Robert Graves. In the second part of his essay, Stroud identifies Derick as Major Frederick 'Derick' Alexander Colquhoun Boothby (1909-1979), 'the leader of several covens in the British Witch Cult', and drawing on the correspondence between Graves and Boothby, discusses Graves's attitude toward witches,³ and the effect of *The White Goddess* on the Wicca community in Britain. Stroud concludes

his essay by examining yet a third treasure concealed in the ‘signed copy’: a card-sized print by the artist Rosalie Loveday, then engaged to Boothby and soon to be his wife. Although conceived for an unconventional Christmas card, the image of a young woman or perhaps a supernatural being draped sensuously in foliage impressed Graves with its uncanny likeness to Margot Callas, with whom he was then in love and for whom he was writing poems. After perusing photographs of Callas, Stroud admits to finding the resemblance uncanny as well.

The term bibliography may be stretched a bit with the concluding essay, a reprint of Patricia T. O’Conner’s masterful introduction to the 2018 Seven Stories Press edition of *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*, by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge. A grammarian and former editor of *The New York Times Book Review*, O’Conner’s erudite and passionate discussion of *Reader* is exemplary and well-deserving of another read and indeed a place in our archives. In her words: ‘[*The Reader Over Your Shoulder*] is the best book on writing ever published. It’s the sanest, most rigorous examination of English prose style to be found anywhere, and it may also be the most peculiar. *I doubt that we’ll see its like again.*’ (emphasis mine).

As in issue one of *The Review*, we are pleased to offer original poetry by six distinguished and talented poets with diverse practices: Joseph Thomas (the poetic alter ego of Joseph T. Thomas, Jr), Dunstan Ward, Beverley Bie Brahic, Stephen Romer, Medha Singh, and Jonathan Davidson. For this issue, we invited an esteemed poet not affiliated with *The Review*, Gregory Leadbetter, to choose work by poets we otherwise might have missed and to provide a brief introduction. He eloquently articulates the inspiration that underlies our initiative:

[The poetry universe] is better conceived as a vast commonwealth of human history, activity, and possibility in which there is always more to discover, to know, and to enjoy than we can ever wholly grasp, quantitatively.

We hope you approve of this innovation as plans are already underway to repeat it in 2023.

We close this second issue of *The Robert Graves Review* by honouring two departed colleagues and friends, Alice Hughes Kersnowski, and Anne Mounic, in personal tributes written respectively by Kathleen Maloney and Dunstan Ward.

I would like to thank William Graves and The Robert Graves Copyright Trust, which holds the copyright on Robert Graves's writing, for allowing us to publish his texts; to William and Philip Graves for transcription triage; to Philip for building a nimble operating system for our website; to my associate editors, Alicja Bembien, for co-piloting this issue, Lucia Graves and Patrick J. Villa, for professionalism and collegiality, Carl Hahn for continuing to unearth texts unknown to Graves research, Dunstan Ward and Fran Brearton for assistance in compiling this journal's Poetry Section; various Editorial Board members for vetting submissions, assisting in and engaging our authors in the writing process, and for their wise and generous advice, and for the continuing support of The Robert Graves Society and its President, Charles Mundy.

NOTES

¹ As he notes, Thomas's talk was part of an online panel presentation at the Pacific American Modern and Ancient Languages Association conference, 13 November 202, a video of which is still available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHsEQCQT3Ec&t=62s>.

² The purpose of the Robert Graves Oral History Project is to record oral histories with people who interacted with Robert Graves. Anybody who fits the description is invited to contact us to discuss arranging a recorded interview. The Project currently consists of three members of The Society: Lucia Graves, Carl Hahn, and Michael Joseph.

³ We will hear more about Boothby and Graves in a subsequent issue of *The Robert Graves Review*.

CRITICAL STUDIES

A Brief Foray into Nonsense by Way of Robert Graves's *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children*

Joseph T. Thomas, Jr.

Abstract: Inflected by the theoretical insights of Wim Tigges, this essay explores the nonsensical elements of Robert Graves's *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children*, focusing primarily on 'Dicky', 'Vain and Careless', and 'The Six Badgers'.

Keywords: literary nonsense; children's poetry; children's literature; nursery rhyme; Wim Tigges

When the word nonsense burst onto the linguistic scene in the seventeenth century, it tended to refer either to 'meaningless words or ideas' or to 'a trivial or worthless thing', only slowly coming to denote that peculiar literary mode we have come to call 'literary nonsense'.¹ This trinity of significations (meaninglessness, worthlessness, and literary nonsense) doubtlessly fascinated Robert Graves, for, in addition to maintaining a career-long interest in 'poetic unreason',² Graves was also intrigued by the seemingly worthless thing – a penny fiddle, say – or even, as Michael Joseph puts it, 'an apparently trite, didactic, cast-off children's rhyme'.³

For those outside the poetry world, poetry is famously disliked ('I too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle', Marianne Moore agrees), yet poetry written for children (often belittled as 'children's verse')⁴ is often dismissed even by those within the poetry world. Surprisingly, even scholars of children's literature tend to relegate poetry for young people to the margins of their discourse, should it be discussed at all.⁵ Not so for Robert Graves. His interest in that which seems worthless resonates both with his abiding interest in childhood and his belief

that poetry, again in the words of Joseph, ‘enacts a transvaluation in which the materially worthless thing is also, simultaneously, the sacred’. This transvaluation, Joseph avers, is at the heart of Graves’s conviction that ‘[l]ike the penny fiddle, a children’s poem can be both the medium of true, ethereal music and still only a toy’.⁶ That is, for Graves, it is ‘the materially valueless thing from which absolute value flows’.⁷ Indeed, one could argue that there is effectively nothing more important than ‘all this fiddle’, even when we talk about penny fiddles. And, especially when we talk about Robert Graves’s 1960 collection of poetry, *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children*.

In *The Penny Fiddle*, Graves employs a purposely archaic poetic idiom – via diction and a self-consciously modulated ‘rough’ and ‘sketchy’ meter – that speaks to its child readers of topics that might alarm even twenty-first-century audiences. Among these topics, we find hopelessness (in the poem ‘Love without Hope’), heartbreak (in ‘The Hills of May’ and ‘One Hard Look’), death and drunkenness (‘How and Why’), fabulous monsters (‘In the Wilderness’ and ‘The Bedpost’), and even class conflict (‘Lift-boy’). ‘Lift-boy’ is an especially interesting case when it comes to this topic, much more in line with traditional nursery rhyme than with the majority of the sweetly arcadian children’s poems published in the mid-century. ‘Lift-boy’ is ultimately a darkly comic meditation on murder / suicide, a dramatization of a youth’s response to the revelation that he lives in a world where ‘[n]ot a soul shall be savéd’ (to rhyme with ‘David’), for ‘[t]he whole First Creation shall forfeit salvation’. (Spoiler alert: the poem’s protagonist responds to this fact by killing himself and the gentleman who laid the unhappy news on him. Yes, in a children’s poem.)⁸

Graves also offers his young readers an eerie ghost poem, ‘Dicky’, which takes the form of a dialogue between mother and son. Despite its unassuming title, ‘Dicky’ is something of a grotesquery. At the heart of the rudely crafted phantasmagoria, moulders an eldritch revenant with a ‘lean, lolling jaw [,...] | garments old and musty’, and a ‘spreading beard’ of ‘cobwebs’. ‘Dicky’ begins with our eponymous young hero singing ‘old country songs’ when, while

‘passing | The Churchyard gate’, he’s ‘stopped’ by ‘[a]n old man’ who censures him for ‘walking late’. Dicky reports:

I did not know the man,
I grew afeared
At his lean, lolling jaw,
His spreading beard.

His garments old and musty,
Of antique cut,
His body very lean and bony,
His eyes tight shut.

Oh, even to tell it now
My courage ebbs ...
His face was clay, Mother,
His beard, cobwebs.

In that long horrid pause
‘Good-night’, he said,
Entered and clicked the gate:
‘Each to his bed’.⁹

The grotesque imagery is as apparent as its archaic tone – both reminiscent of the folk tale and nursery rhyme. These qualities are found throughout *Penny Fiddle*, and they are resonant with literary nonsense.

Literary nonsense had existed well before we arrived at a tidy term for it; as Michael Heyman and Kevin Shortsleeve remind us, we can find literary nonsense within the medieval carnivalesque tradition Mikhail Bakhtin explores in *Rabelais and His World*: ‘a “grotesque” genre of “absurd compositions” that revel in “linguistic freedom”, illogical sequences, and the “inside out”’.¹⁰ According to Heyman and Shortsleeve, ‘[o]ver several hundred years, variant meanings of *grotesque*’ emerged, including ‘rugged’, ‘unpolished’, ‘distorted’, ‘irregular’, ‘fantastically extravagant’, and ‘bizarre’.

Simultaneously, the grotesque was used to characterize texts ‘considered quaint or immaterial, ludicrous or fantastically absurd, and by 1822, “very amusing”. Reflecting these varied meanings, *grotesque* [quickly] became the favored term for literary nonsense as it grew in popularity in Victorian England’.¹¹ Heyman and Shortsleeve also note that in *The Poetry of Nonsense*, published in 1925, Emile Cammaerts uses ‘*grotesque* almost interchangeably with the word *nonsense* to describe the rough, childlike, sketchy, or exaggerated’.¹²

Other varieties of the grotesque – those playfully absurd and illogically topsy-turvy compositions gestured to above – are also prominent in *The Penny Fiddle*. Take ‘Vain and Careless’, for instance, a piece that brings us closer to our contemporary understanding of literary nonsense. Like ‘Dicky’, ‘Vain and Careless’ also recalls the nursery rhyme, both in form and content. Initially, it struck me as belonging to the same poetic species as the well-known nursery rhyme, ‘Jack Sprat’:

Jack Sprat could eat no fat.
 His wife could eat no lean.
 But, together both,
 They licked the platter clean.

Of course, both poems concern ‘ill-matched pairs’ (one of the many subjects Wim Tigges argues that nursery rhymes share with nonsense).¹³ However, ‘Vain and Careless’ turns out to be quite another type entirely. At first blush, it appears to be one of those ‘apparently trite, didactic, cast-off children’s rhyme[s]’ Michael Joseph refers to above. After describing Mr Vain and Miss Careless, it ends with this seemingly straightforward articulation of an overt moral:

This gentle-born couple
 Lived and died apart –
 Water will not mix with oil,
 Nor vain with careless heart.¹⁴

But there is more to the poem than that. Where the poem succeeds is where the nonsense lies. It may not be ‘pure’ nonsense as characterised by Tigges, but it is nonsense. Before I explore it – along with ‘The Six Badgers’, the purest nonsense in the book – allow me a few moments on Tigges.

Although one finds in *The Penny Fiddle* very few examples of what Tigges would call ‘pure’ literary nonsense, one does chance upon the kind of folksy, antique verse that typifies ‘Dicky’ and ‘Vain and Careless’: verse suggestive of the nursery. While Tigges tends to distance nursery rhyme from ‘pure’ nonsense, he grants that it ‘seems to represent an early stage of nonsense writing’,¹⁵ adding that ‘many old poems [identified as nursery rhymes] “lost” the sense they may originally have conveyed and came to be relegated to the nursery [...] simply because of their “musical” effects’ (p. 9). In his characterization of ‘pure’ nonsense, Tigges builds on the insights afforded by Elizabeth Sewell’s 1952 study *The Field of Nonsense*, in which she argues that literary nonsense is marked by the productive tension between sense and its contrary: non-sense. For Tigges, literary nonsense presents ‘the seeming presence of one or more “sensible” meanings [...] kept in balance by a simultaneous absence of such a meaning’. That is, for Tigges, literary nonsense exists on a spectrum with perfect sense on one end, and absolute gibberish on the other, ‘purest’ variety of nonsense burbling happily at the point between. (p. 255). Nonsense, then, requires the push and pull of these two poles, non-sense and sense. The quintessence of literary nonsense is found in the tension created by playfully indeterminate over-abundance (or lack) of meaning balanced with a sense of order, design, semiotic satisfaction, and clear teleology. Without that sense of sense, countered neatly with the non-sensical, one approaches something akin to the complexity of Dada on one end and simple light verse on the other. This need for sense and design explains why so much literary nonsense is disciplined with meter, rhyme, and other formal techniques of poetry. Similarly, it explains why writers of literary nonsense tend to avoid prose, as its formal designs are less obvious. Rather, they prefer the more

conspicuous formal devices afforded by nonsense verse (or, minus the sneer, nonsense poetry).

So, back to 'Vain and Careless'. Its title initially reads as a double descriptor of one person, both vain and careless. However, the title actually describes the 'gentle-born couple' of the final stanza, one of Tigges's 'ill-matched pairs' that, besides being called 'a couple' is decidedly not a couple, at least not in the amorous sense, as we discover they '[l]ived and died apart'. Their neighbours, however, believe they should be a couple: they 'saw it plain', '[a] splendid match surely'. Why, exactly? Who knows? Here sense butts against non-sense; here we see meaning counterpoised by the lack of meaning.

Graves casts the poem as a loose ballad: rustic and unpolished in its meter almost to the point of transforming into accentual verse. Each quatrain rhymes ABCB, the lines tending to four, three, four, and then three stresses. Graves has a predilection for these loose, almost accentual folk rhythms in his children's rhymes: the meter rugged, unpolished, and irregular, even as the subject wrought in that meter is fantastically extravagant and bizarre. In his forward to *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes*, Graves testifies to his affection for the accentual, folk rhythms of the nursery rhyme, explaining that '[c]hildren unlearned in the social uses of poetry' have not had their 'natural sense of rhythm [...] destroyed by the metronome of school-room prosody' (and the meter in 'Vain and Careless', free from the clockwork regularity of the metronome, clearly evinces Graves's own 'natural sense of rhythm'). He continues, insisting that 'the best of the older [nursery rhymes] are nearer to poetry than the greater part of *The Oxford Book of English Verse*',¹⁶ a preference he anticipates in his monograph *Poetic Unreason*. He writes, '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'.¹⁷

Counter-intuitively (for Tigges's pure nonsense tends to be metrically exact), the looser meter of 'Vain and Careless' adds to its nonsense, giving it that lived-in aura of common-sense, that sure, comfortably teleological feel necessary for nonsense. It seems like sense, but push only a bit, and the sense crumbles. Mr Vain is so vainglorious

that he ‘walk[s] on stilts | To be seen by the crowd’. Yet the crowd loves him: ‘all the people ran about | Shouting till he passed’. Any didactic poem worth its salt would condemn the man for his vanity. And, sure, while the universe punishes him by vexing his ‘splendid match’ (just as Careless is evidently doomed to live her life ‘play[ing] bobcherry’ without ‘the vain man [who] went by her, | Aloft in the air’), we are forced to wonder at the poem’s nonsensical moral: both seem happy; neither pursues a mate; only the neighbours seem to want them together; so again we are forced to wonder: who cares? The poem, then, works as a poem by virtue of its music, its absurd images and illogical sequences, its summoning of didacticism only to wave it away. The poem begins with Careless giving away her baby. (Where did she get a baby? Surely, our vain, stilt-wearing hero is not the father. And if not, are we meant to believe he would find a single mother his ideal mate?):

Lady, lovely lady,
 Careless and gay!
 Once, when a beggar called,
 She gave her child away. (p. 37)

As one does, the ‘[b]eggar took the baby, | Wrapped it in a shawl’. But our ostensibly careless heroine is perhaps not so careless after all, for she admonishes him: ‘Bring him back [...] | Next time you call!’ Here we have something akin to what Tigges calls ‘the popular type of irrational nonsense found in nursery rhymes, topsy-turvy tales and similar ancient samples of inconsequentiality’ (p. 85), and it is in images like this – the sight of our careless and gay heroine happily giving away her baby as blithely as she would direction to the town’s millinery – that we find the poem’s nonsense, and in such images lies the poem’s considerable charm.

As I explain in a recent essay,¹⁸ Graves’s affection for childhood, folk poetry, nursery rhyme, and nonsense runs deep in his poetic practice, whether he writes for children, within the hearing of children, or for the adults those children may grow into. In *Robert Graves: The Lasting Poetic Achievement*, D. N. G Carter calls

‘typically Gravesian’ the ‘working towards an adult end the language, rhythms, objects and situations characteristic of the nursery’, including, I would add, the nursery’s rhymes. He continues, noting that ‘Graves perceives in the child’s world modes of apprehension dulled in the adult’s, but still important to the poet’.¹⁹

However, Graves’s interest in writing for children suggests that he is also interested in working ‘the language, rhythms, objects and situations characteristic of the nursery’ towards ends appropriate for a more mysterious construction of childhood than that held by many of his contemporaries, than that held by many of our contemporaries. And one of the ways he achieves this end involves nonsense, that peculiar mode of writing involving the equipoise of sense and nonsense, the rational and the irrational, meaning and non-meaning, poetic reason and unreason. As Carter writes:

In one fundamental sense Graves is a poet of reason: the compact between him and his readers [...] is soundly based upon the principles of logical discourse and the formalities of an accepted syntax. In another sense, however, equally fundamental, he is a poet of ‘unreason’: his subjects are nightmares, terrors, hauntings, pathological states of mind, fugitive areas of consciousness, quite as often as they pertain to matters more normative, within the law. (p. 117)

What Carter describes in this passage is a kind of conceptual nonsense, very much in the vein of Wim Tigges. And this conceptual frame explains Graves’s deep love of literary nonsense, which he articulates 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 ‘The Dong with a Luminous Nose’. Graves insists that ‘though there may not be found a Classical Scholar to admit it’, Lear’s famous Dong is ‘essentially as tragic a figure as Cadmus of the Greek legend seeking his lost Europa, even a more

painful one'. Continuing, he notes that it is 'strange that Lear is treated less seriously' than other great poets. In a startling gesture as provocative as it is sincere, Graves places Lear beside Shakespeare in the poetic firmament, 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). Of course, the purposely tensionless agon at the heart of 'Vain and Careless' fails to approach the tragedy of either Shakespeare's *King Lear* or Lear's 'The Dong with the Luminous Nose' – as it should – for the nonsensical effects of 'Vain and Careless' pullulate about this very illusion of conflict. The crisis of the terrible foolery set up by the poem exists only in the minds of its protagonists' neighbours; again, both Careless and Vain seem perfectly happy living and dying apart. And are likely better for it.

With 'The Six Badgers', Graves offers us a taste of pure nonsense, albeit a rather retired example. It concerns the eponymous sextet of badgers, who walk up to one Farmer George (busy at work hoeing his 'lands'), encircle him, bow, and adjure him to '[h]urry home' to dinner. Despite the purported need for haste, the badgers don't run up to him. All told, they seem rather staid, our white-wand-wielding badgers. And, while Farmer George obeys the badgers (who can blame him?), there is no evidence that he drops his hoe and races home. Rather, he simply reports (the poem is a first-person account), '[s]o homeward I went'. However, the farmer is left (again, blamelessly) unable to understand why this unusual crew of talking, bewanded badgers sought him out simply to inform him that his dinner is ready. A fair bit of nonsense, the whole proceeding. Let's hear the story again, this time in verse:

As I was a-hoeing, a-hoeing my lands,
Six badgers walked up, with white wands in their hands.
They formed a ring round me and, bowing, they said:
'Hurry home, Farmer George, for the table is spread!
There's pie in the oven, there's beef on the plate:
Hurry home, Farmer George, if you would not be late!
So homeward went I, but could not understand

Why six fine dog-badgers with white wands in hand
Should seek me out hoeing, and bow in a ring,
And all to inform me so common a thing!²⁰

This queer, singular example of pure nonsense is cast in ten lines, oddly broken and asymmetrical.²¹ Its initial sextet mirrors its six, wand-wielding badgers – not unlike the ‘[g]rey-headed beadles [...] with wands as white as snow’ of William Blake’s ‘Holy Thursday’ from *Songs of Innocence*. Its concluding quatrain tells of Farmer George’s bemused walk home, leaving the ‘rich and fruitful land’ of Blake’s ‘Holy Thursday’ (this time from *Songs of Experience*) in anticipation of a well-appointed table, a pie in the oven, and beef on the plate, wondering, just like the reader, at the nonsense within the very poem in which he lives: why would six fine dog-badgers with white wands in hand seek him out hoeing, bowing in a ring, all to inform him of so common a thing? Of course, there is no single answer, although there are many, for the poem presents its readers with an over-abundance of meaning. It is worth recalling that, in an essay anticipating *Anatomy of Nonsense*, Tigges stresses that nonsense can be characterised by balancing ‘absence of meaning’ with ‘a multiplicity of meaning’ (emphasis mine),²² a multiplicity evident here: one is tempted to pull out one’s slide rule and protractor, to search one’s *variora* and encyclopaedia of literary symbology for badger and wand and hoe, and get to work.

However, the poem’s concluding question (*why would six dog-badgers seek me out to tell me that dinner’s served?*) is only implied, embedded as it is within a statement. More overt is a decisive articulation of indeterminacy, our narrator insisting that he ‘could not understand’ why these badgers, armed with white wands, would gather about him ‘to inform [him] so common a thing’. We’re encouraged to accept the conclusion’s indeterminacy even as the final exclamation mark (as opposed to an eroteme) deters us from venturing an answer to the implied query by way of some extravagant literary critical interpretation. Michael Heyman understands this impulse to interpret, but, in ‘A New Defense of Nonsense; or, Where Then Is His Phallus? and Other Questions

Not to Ask', he warns us to resist it when reading literary nonsense, a warning with which the poem's syntax is in accord. Heyman reminds us that literary nonsense 'offer[s] endless loops of meaning, constantly making and breaking sense-relations between words themselves and between the word and the world'. Therefore, he adds, to 'experience the full effect of nonsense' one must learn to enjoy 'endlessly juggling a meaning and its absence', learn to resist fixing the meaning of any example of literary nonsense.²³ Farmer George's six badgers, encircling him – yet bowing as they do – are suggestive of this endless loop of signification, their wands threatening (like the wands of Blake's beadles), but also beautiful ('white as snow'), pointing the way home to a hearty, nourishing meal. The world created by 'Six Badgers', built on the opposition of the marvellous (talking, wand-wielding badgers) and the quotidian ('so common a thing'), rests on this grammatically unasked and ultimately unanswerable question. It is a question as fine as a group of dog-badgers with white wands in hand, and it is an unanswerable, unasked question that the poem answers (if you will grant me a nonsensical contradiction) with a single, two-syllable word, one as common as warm dinner after a day's hard work, and one just as marvellous: *nonsense*. And just maybe that is answer enough.²⁴

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NOTES

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘Nonsense’. Michael Heyman and Kevin Shortsleeve elaborate on the linguistic development of the sense of nonsense in their essay, ‘Nonsense’, in *Keywords for Children’s Literature*, ed. by Lissa Paul, Philip Nel and Nina Christensen, 2nd edn (New York UP, 2021), pp. 133-36.

² Explored by a thirty-year-old Robert Graves in *Poetic Unreason* (London: Palmer, 1925), a work which Biblio and Tannen Booksellers and Publishers would republish in 1968, only eight years after *The Penny Fiddle*.

³ 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), p. 88.

⁴ The term ‘children’s verse’ implies a hierarchical distinction between verse and poetry, one articulated by John Hollander in *Rhyme’s Reason*, in which he writes: ‘Poetry is a matter of trope; and verse, of scheme and design [...] which is why most verse is not poetry’. *Rhyme’s Reason: A Guide to English Verse* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 1.

⁵ For more on the neglect of children’s poetry by those in and out of the discipline of children’s literature, see my essay, ‘Modern and Contemporary Children’s Poetry’, in *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*, ed. by Alfred Bendixen and Stephanie Burt (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1103-22.

⁶ Michael Joseph, ‘Poetic Nonsense: Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* and Children’s Poetry’, *Gravesiana*, 3 (2013), 667.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 675.

⁸ Robert Graves, ‘Lift-boy’, in *The Penny Fiddle: Poems for Children* (London: Cassell, 1960), p. 23.

⁹ *Penny Fiddle*, pp. 27-9.

¹⁰ Heyman and Shortsleeve, p. 133.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Wim Tigges, *Anatomy of Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), p. 102. Tigges is perhaps the best theorist of nonsense no one has ever read. In addition to his *Anatomy of Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi,

1988), see also his excellent edited collection *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987).

¹⁴ *Penny Fiddle*, pp. 37-8.

¹⁵ Tigges, p. 100.

¹⁶ Robert Graves, *The Less Familiar Nursery Rhymes* (London: Benn, 1927), p. iii.

¹⁷ Robert Graves, *Poetic Unreason* (London: Palmer, 1925), p. 126.

¹⁸ See my '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', *Robert Graves Review*, 1.1 (2021), 53-81.

¹⁹ D. N. G. Carter, *Robert Graves: The Lasting Poetic Achievement* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 173.

²⁰ *Penny Fiddle*, p. 14.

²¹ For more on the nonsensical aspects of 'The Six Badgers', see Michael Joseph's *'My Infant Head': A History of Children's Poetry in English; September 23, 2008 – January 10, 2009* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Libraries, 2008), p. 43, in which he explores the embodiment of nonsense in irregular meter. Granting that 'The Six Badgers' 'is light', he argues that its levity 'belies its complexity', and that the poem 'invites a consideration of the rigorous strangeness of poetry'. However, Joseph continues, it 'place[s] unusual demands on the reader's intelligence', as an awareness of that invitation depends somewhat on the reader's apprehension of its metrical peculiarities. Joseph explains, 'the theme of the impossible intruding upon the ordinary is conveyed metrically, as well as semantically, as a line featuring five stressed syllables (**why six fine dog-badgers**), intrudes upon an otherwise metrically placid tableau'. Joseph's observation resonates with the contrapuntal relationship of sense and nonsense so central to Tigges's conception of literary nonsense. The 'metrically placid tableau' operates as a sensical framework disrupted by the 'five stressed syllables' that function as a kind of metrical metonym for nonsense.

²² Tigges, 'Anatomy of Nonsense', *Dutch Quarterly Review*, 16 (1986), 167; *Explorations in the Field of Nonsense*, pp. 23-46.

²³ 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), 193.

²⁴ This essay is a much revised and extended version of ‘Smashing the Penny Fiddle: Colliding Oppositions in Robert Graves’s Children’s Poetry’, a paper I presented at the 118th Annual Conference of the Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association (2021), as part of the ‘Masks and Paradoxes in the Work of Robert Graves’ panel sponsored by the Robert Graves Society.

Graves, Ghosts, Madness, Magic & Religion

Richard Carder

Abstract: This essay looks at several loosely related topics. Most prominent among these are the appearance of ghosts in Robert Graves's poetry, both as metaphors and their association with madness, and actual apparitions, and Graves's ideas about death and the paranormal, along with his association with psychics. It concludes with some observations on the poet's alterity and how it expresses itself and anticipates the dilemmas confronting civilization today.

Keywords: ghosts, death, parapsychology, nuclear accidents

Ghosts

It is hardly surprising that Robert Graves had a fascination with death, having inherited such a surname from his father. Death also became a personal possibility when he joined the wartime army soon after leaving school, which he considers in 1915 in 'The Shadow of Death':

Here's an end to my art
I must die and I know it
With battle-murder at my heart
Sad end for a poet!¹

But death already appeared in poems written at Charterhouse, which were published in his first book, *Over the Brazier*, in 1916.² In 'The Dying Knight and the Fauns', he depicts the death of a hero, and incidentally writes about psychedelic mushrooms – a motif which would recur years later, after his meeting with Gordon Wasson. 'Munching mushrooms red as coral': one wonders if he knew of

the effects of *Amanita muscaria*, at such a tender age! Life after death is also considered here, as ‘the fauns still think him living’ (*Complete Poems*, p. 5).

Ghosts also make their first appearance in *Over the Brazier* in ‘Ghost Music’, in which he considers an old organ loft in a church, where: ‘the ghosts of long-dead melodies’ hang like bats from the rafters, though these are friendly ghosts, ‘drowsy-sweet, they huddle here in harmony’ (p. 8). Death is present in most of the poems in the second half of the book, and its successor, *Goliath and David*.³ But not until the final poem, ‘Not Dead’, do we meet the first real ghost, that of his dear friend, David Thomas, to whom the book was dedicated, and who was killed at Fricourt in March 1916.⁴ In ‘Not Dead’ he recognises his friend: ‘Walking through trees to cool my heart and pain, | I know that David’s with me again. | All that is simple, happy, strong, he is’ (*Collected Poems*, p. 28). In his next book, *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1917),⁵ the ghost in ‘When I’m Killed’, is again a benign one, his own, who will not be found either ‘buried there in Cambrin Wood, or with the intolerable Good’; and certainly not with the ‘damned to Hell’, but rather living through ‘these verses that you’ve read’ (*Collected Poems*, p. 37).

The moon, often paired metaphorically with ghosts, can also assume a ghostly appearance. It first appears in Graves’s canon in a rather silly schoolboy lyric, ‘The Jolly Yellow Moon’ (p. 7), but later in a more sinister guise in ‘The Cruel Moon’, where the moon’s ‘face is stupid, but her eye is small and sharp and very sly’; though the prospect of her inducing madness is introduced by ‘the nurse’, the poet dismisses the possibility, since ‘moons hang much too far away’ (p. 34): an attitude which he would later reject comprehensively! Another ghost appears in ‘Corporal Stare’ at Bethune, where his former comrades are enjoying a seven-course dinner,

Then through the window suddenly,
 Badge, stripes and medals all complete,
 We saw him swagger up the street,
 Just like a live man
 [...]

He paused, saluted smartly, grinned,
Then passed away like a puff of wind. (p. 53)

These hauntings by dead soldiers continued for some years after the War, contributing to Graves's neurasthenia and aversion to crowds and cities. He refers again to these ghosts in 'Haunted', 'I'm ashamed to greet | Dead men down the morning street', asking them to confine their activities to night-time (*Collected Poems*, p. 92). From the same collection (*Country Sentiment*)⁶ comes 'The Haunted House', which conjures the more traditional ghostly features of 'bone-chilled, flesh-creeping [...] groans and knockings in the gloom' (p. 84). This description has something in common with lines from Edmund Blunden's poem 'The Waggoner' – 'But in the dim court the ghost is gone, from the hug-secret yew to the penthouse wall' – and from 'The Barn' – 'The barn is old, but not a place of spectral fear; and no phantom wailing will be heard'.⁷ Shared gothic elements aside, Graves's ghosts in 'The Haunted House' are frightening, whereas Blunden's are friendly.

Madness figured in Graves's awareness since the War, most famously, when he got Siegfried Sassoon into Craiglockhart Hospital to save him from being court martialled.⁸ After the trauma of the War, Graves heeded the work of Dr William Rivers,⁹ Sassoon's attending psychologist. The War had given him an aversion to towns and cities, and his classical education encouraged looking even further back than the Roman Empire to find where humans had gone astray from wholesome living, which then developed into prophecies about the collapse of our current civilisation. He had also observed Ivor Gurney's 'persecution complex' at their meetings in Oxford,¹⁰ and knew of his confinement in an asylum; but the word does not appear in his poems about himself until 'The Cool Web', in which he fears loss of language as in senile dementia:

But if we let our tongues lose self-possession
Throwing off language and its watery clasp
Before our death
[...]

We shall go mad no doubt and die that way. (p. 283)

This plight was still hypothetical; but, in 1936, he felt madness approaching, and wrote about it in ‘The Halls of Bedlam’: ‘Father in his shirtsleeves flourishing a hatchet’ (p. 372). That year saw the start of a long period of instability for Graves, as the British consul advised immediate departure in early August from Mallorca, following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.¹¹

This may also have triggered fearful memories of his own war service. Back in England, he was also in contact with his abandoned children; and although no longer in love with Laura Riding, he still supported her campaign to prevent another war, so all these agitations could have resulted in chronic instability of mind.

Ghosts, either real or imaginary continued to make frequent appearances in his poems until 1938, when he began to fall in love with Beryl Hodge, while they were living in the French Chateau near Rennes.¹² His relationship with Riding was by then very tense, and near to a breaking point. He found some expression of his feelings in another ghost poem: ‘The Suicide in the Copse’, in which the ghost stares down at his dead body, and all he can see is, ‘a year-old sheet of sporting news, & a crumpled schoolboy essay’, and realises that living offers more chance of hope than death (*Collected Poems*, p. 395). The final split with Riding came next year in the USA, and led to a new life beginning in 1940. Beryl’s gentle nature brought about a more harmonious relationship than he had had with Riding, and a change in his psychology, which finds expression in the title poem of his next book of fifty selected poems the same year, ‘No More Ghosts’, in which an old patriarchal four-poster bed, inhabited by ancestral ghosts, is cut up and made into more ‘wholesome’ furniture.¹³ His wholehearted love for Beryl, his second wife, had had a salutary effect on his sense of being haunted.

No new ghost can appear. Their poor cause
Was that time freezes, and time thaws;
But here only such loves can last

As do not ride upon the weathers of the past'. (*Complete Poems*, p. 385)

A certain kind of ghost (a 'new ghost') may be banished, but other imaginary creatures, present in Graves's poetry from the very beginning, haunt the poems, and madness is still a prospect. In 'The Shot', 'honest human nature knows its own miracle: not to go mad' (p. 392). Imaginary imps, called 'Lollocks' are produced by sloth or sorrow, or 'when the imbecile aged are overlong in dying' (p. 393). With the exception of the poet, 'men cannot see them', do not believe in them, but are inflicted with 'boils on the neck', or stomach aches. From the siege of Troy, a departing spirit arises from the body of Penthesilea (p. 461), after Achilles commits necrophilia on her corpse, and then kills Thersites, who sniggered at the spectacle. The phantoms of 'The Sea Horse' are rather imaginary doubles, 'who assume your walk and face', when the love-sick poet worries if his love is returned (p. 452).

Apart from the figurative language of poetry, Graves dismissed the possibility of reincarnation. In 1956, a book was published in the USA, called *The Search for Bridey Murphy* by Morey Bernstein, a hypnotist, who recorded the story of a young woman, Ruth Simmons, relating in hypnotic trance how she had lived a previous life in Ireland 150 years earlier. Many of the details of her life in Belfast proved to be true. In his review, Graves rejects the possibility of reincarnation, supposing that she had overheard the story of Bridey Murphy while dozing as a child and subconsciously recorded the conversation.¹⁴

It is probable that this same book aroused the curiosity of Dr Ian Stevenson, who, in 1957, became the head of the department of psychiatry at the University of Virginia Medical School, and started his research into reports of children who remembered their previous lives. His research involves no hypnotism but relies on interviews with young children who recall their former names, where they lived, and their relatives in that life. He follows this up by travelling to the place and talking to the people who remember the person named, often taking the child there, who recognises and identifies his former

relatives. Stevenson investigated over 2000 such cases, and a review of his work in the journal of the American Medical Association states that ‘he [...] collected cases in which the evidence is difficult to explain on any other grounds except reincarnation’.¹⁵

I already knew of Stevenson’s work when I began my correspondence with Robert in 1967, while studying music in Birmingham. During the interval before his last letter in November 1972, I was working in a Steiner school for handicapped children, and wrote to him about reincarnation, which was central to Rudolph Steiner’s philosophy. He replied:

My view of birth is that it is decided in the moment of death, and that there is no past existence or pre-existence, there being no such thing as time, except as a matter of convenient reckoning. This is not an enigmatic remark, it simply refers to the proper use of the 5th dimension.¹⁶

I knew something about the fifth dimension, having read a book of the same title by Vera Alder,¹⁷ and understood it to be a realm outside and beyond time. This realm may relate to Graves’s claim to practise ‘analeptic’ trance, a form of time-travel, whereby he could inhabit a former person, such as Claudius; and is alluded to in his poem, ‘To Bring the Dead to Life’:

To bring the dead to life
Is no great magic.
Few are wholly dead:
Blow on a dead man’s embers
And a live flame will start.¹⁸

Some years later, Kathleen Raine replied to my question about Graves’s views, by saying that he was a Euhemerist,¹⁹ believing only in gods who manifest in human form. Euhemerus was a Sicilian philosopher of c. 300 BC, who believed that all gods and their myths are derived from human behaviour.

He was to keep the same humanistic approach in *The Greek Myths*, and embody the philosophy in his poem, 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice', in which he asserts that: 'Her sea-grey eyes were wild | But nothing promised that is not performed' (*Complete Poems*, pp. 405-06). This assertion was a sly dig at conventional Christianity, according to which 'heaven' can be reached only after death, following a virtuous life, rather than in a loving human relationship. Despite his ecclesiastical forebears, Graves had a horror of priests in their black robes, in common with William Blake.²⁰

In June 1943, came the news that Graves's eldest son David had been killed in action, in Burma. Graves was then writing his retelling of the story of Jason and the Argonauts,²¹ in which the Goddess makes perhaps her first appearance in Graves's oeuvre as Isis. Graves was familiar with Frazer's, *Golden Bough*,²² which describes the ritual sacrifice of kings at the end of a season, and in that context, David's death may have triggered the analeptic trance that was to result in his magnum opus, *The White Goddess*.²³

The Paranormal

When he was approached by Eileen Garrett in 1942, who had just set up her Creative Age Press in the USA, asking if she might publish any of his new writing, he was set fair for his next six books.²⁴ Garrett, with whom Graves got on well, was well known as a psychic medium. She wrote to him after receiving the first draft of *The White Goddess*:

I have in my way been preoccupied for years with thoughts and studies concerning the origins of religions, and I spent ten years of my life studying in the College of Psychic Science in London, searching for objective meanings to the great pattern of subjective language.²⁵

Graves was aware of Garrett's gift as a psychic and told Martin Seymour-Smith he found her great fun, and that the two of them

got on like two oysters on a plate. Although American, she was brought up in Ireland, which gave them more in common. She wrote about her contact with Graves in her autobiography:

I was fortunate enough to publish several of his books, and to have him tell me about his method of going deeply into the collective unconscious, where he derived great knowledge in abstract terms. He told me he was careful to check with eminent scholars everything that he learned from the deep unconscious.²⁶

His creed as a Euhemerist prevented him from accepting that we have more than one life, or may spontaneously contact the dead. Nevertheless, healers, such as Betty Shine, have claimed success in this undertaking. Perhaps the most amazing incident she recounts is her telephone conversation with her mother,²⁷ who had been dead for five years. She also records many instances of missing objects turning up in unexpected places, a phenomenon Graves also experienced, as he wrote in November 1969:

If I lose anything which I must have back, I simply invoke St Antony of Padua who never fails me. But be careful to address him, and not St Antony the Abbott, or you will lose something else. A fortnight ago I lost my ticket and passport in an Oslo hotel 5 minutes before I was due for my return plane. St Antony produced it within 3 minutes from an impossible quarter [...] What all this means really is I suppose a 'magical' means of focussing one's attention on circumstances, which in one's ordinary way of thinking, one cannot possibly envisage. In scientific terms it is 5th dimensional thinking. Since the name of St Antony has so long been an instrument of Christendom inducing this way of thought, it has acquired power that nothing else that I know of (except certain Sufic divinatory measures) possesses.²⁸

Psychic energies of the kind which Graves used habitually are denied in the prevailing orthodoxy of modern materialistic science, as it will not fit into their mathematical formulae; but plenty of

scientific work has been done in this area, as may be seen in the archives of the Society for Psychical Research, founded in Britain in the late nineteenth century. A good example of such is the faculty of ‘remote viewing’, in which distant objects can be seen clearly by those with the gift, such as Ingo Swann and Pat Price, who are able to see and describe things hundreds of miles away if given the map co-ordinates. Examples of this are given in Lynne McTaggart’s book, *The Field*, which gives a comprehensive guide to much contemporary research, including the work of British biologist, Dr Rupert Sheldrake, who, she says:

in a rush of fevered inspiration at an ashram in India, worked out his hypothesis of formative causation, which states that the forms of living things [...] are shaped by morphic fields, [...] which have a cumulative memory of similar systems through cultures and time.²⁹

Sheldrake explains his theories in more detail in his book, *A New Science of Life*, for example in the field of parapsychology.

Even within modern Western society, there are persistent reports of apparently inexplicable phenomena, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, memories of past lives, hauntings, poltergeists, psychokinesis, and so on. In so far as these phenomena cannot be explained in terms of the known laws of physics and chemistry, from the mechanistic point of view they ought not to occur.³⁰

Sheldake’s ideas and intuitions about the world strike a note of defiance against the prevailing Western philosophy but harmonize in their alterity with Graves’s views. In the nineteen-sixties, prodded by Omar Ali-Shah,³¹ he embarked on a new translation of *The Rubaiyat* (Graves would spell it *Rubaiyyat*) of Omar Khayyam. Ali-Shah maintained that the poem is a mystical religious poem in the Sufi tradition and encouraged Graves to make that clear in his new translation, which he does, explaining in his introduction that,

‘Khayaam [sic] treats wine in Sufic fashion as a metaphor of the ecstasy excited by divine love’ (p. 4).

Khayyam was a middle-aged University professor at the College of Nishapur, who broke away from his academic colleagues to return to a Sufi way of thought of the eleventh century AD. ‘His university colleagues felt only scorn for Sufis, whom they regarded at best as heretical enthusiasts’ (p. 3). Graves’s encounter with the goddess during his frenzied writing of *The White Goddess* utterly changed his previous aversion to religion, to which a primary female aspect was added. He was later to co-author a book about Genesis, showing how the female attributes of God had been suppressed by the patriarchal priests.³² So, the discovery of Khayyam as a Sufi mystic was inspiring, and tuned in well with his new acceptance of the religion of love.

One sees another comparable mythic principle in Graves’s post-*Goddess* writing. The Indian Goddess, Kali, appears several times in *The White Goddess* in her dual aspect of benefactress and universal mother, and the opposite as fury and ogress. Graves also prescribes: ‘Only after a period of complete political and religious disorganisation can the suppressed desire of the Western races, which is for some practical form of Goddess-worship, with her love not limited to maternal benevolence, and her after-world not deprived of a sea, find satisfaction at last;’³³ an idea which he explores more fully in *Seven Days in New Crete*, in which the new Golden Age has dawned after a complete breakdown of mechanical civilisation, and poets have at last become the acknowledged rulers. He does not use the Indian word Yuga (age), perhaps from a distaste for systemisation learned from his Indian friend, Basanta Mallick,³⁴ in the early nineteen twenties, but he surely must have had some awareness of the cycle of the four Hindu Yugas, in the ratio of 4-3-2-1 in the length of years; in which the Satya Yuga (the Age of Truth) corresponds to the Western ‘Golden Age’, which declines into the ‘Silver Age’, then ‘Bronze Age’, and finally the shortest, most materialistic and least spiritual, ‘Iron Age’, ruled by Kali in her destructive aspect.

The signs that we are living in the Iron Age become more obvious each year, with the world being increasingly taken over by money and mechanisation; its most sinister aspect being the Nuclear Power Industry – described by Albert Einstein as ‘a hell of a way to boil water’.³⁵ There have been several attempted assassinations (e.g. Karen Silkwood, & Dr Rosalie Bertell)³⁶ connected with the nuclear industry,³⁷ one of which purportedly claimed the life of Clifford Dalton, husband of Graves’s daughter, Catherine. Her book on the case quotes a letter from Graves of 2 January 1966, comparing it with Kennedy’s death in 1963:

The story sounded so cloak-and-dagger, that I was very glad in 1965 to meet that man in Mexico City who worked under Cliff and told me that there were powerful and conscienceless elements who might well be working against you [...] It is like the Dallas Shooting: one knows that it wasn’t just poor Oswald who shot Kennedy but a hired and well-protected marksman, and the finger points (I am told) at [...] Ordinary people can’t believe it; it’s too much like *I, Claudius* (but *Die Nasty* was a joke at my prep school).³⁸

His printed letter omits the name of the assassin, presumably after legal advice, but it would have been known to Catherine. William Blake’s ‘mind-forged manacles’ of the Iron Age tighten their grip, at the same time as seeds of the New Age are being sown.

The ‘mad scientists’ (of *Seven Days in New Crete*) are regrettably not yet running down corridors in terror, pursued by visions of the Goddess as a Fury! These hubristic apprentices, all descended from Perseus, are incompetent in the absence of the ‘Sorcerer’ (viz. Henri Dukas), and this Iron Age is ending with bangs after all, though with much whimpering to follow. Whether the human race is doomed to become a mere unlamented ghost or whether magic will save us is a question one wishes Robert Graves were here to answer.

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Ivor Gurney, *Seven Sappho Songs* (London: Thames, 2000). As a keen environmentalist, he campaigns for Friends of the Earth.

NOTES

¹ Robert Graves, *Complete Poems in One Volume*, ed. by Patrick Quinn (Manchester: Carcanet, 2000), p. 13. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Graves's poems in this article are to this volume. To help establish a chronology, titles and dates of books in which poems first appeared have been added.

² Robert Graves, *Over the Brazier* (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1916).

³ Robert Graves, *Goliath and David* (London: Chiswick Press, 1917).

⁴ Graves was also reported dead in August that year, so he knew something of the afterlife, as he describes in 'Escape', *Collected Poems* (pp. 27-28).

⁵ Robert Graves, *Fairies and Fusiliers* (London: Heinemann, 1917).

⁶ Robert Graves, *Country Sentiment* (London: Martin Secker, 1920).

⁷ Edmund Blunden, 'Waggoner' and 'Barn', in *Poems of Today* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson 1922), pp. 51, 60.

⁸ Robert Graves, *Good-Bye to All That: The Original Edn.* Ed. and annotated with an introduction by Andrew Motion (London: Penguin, 2014), pp. 316-27; Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves: The Assault Heroic, 1895-1926* (New York: Viking, 1987), pp. 179-81.

⁹ W. H. R. Rivers, *Medicine, Magic and Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁰ Richard Carder, 'Gurney's Journeys to Graves', *Gurney Society Journal*, 10 (2004), 73.

¹¹ Miranda Seymour, *Robert Graves: Life on the Edge* (New York: Holt, 1995), pp. 239-40.

¹² Seymour, pp. 263-67.

¹³ Robert Graves, *No More Ghosts* (London: Faber, 1940). The poem 'No More Ghosts' appears in *Collected Poems* (p. 385).

¹⁴ Robert Graves, 'Reincarnation', in *The Crane Bag* (London: Cassell, 1969), p. 75.

¹⁵ Tom Shroder, *Old Souls: Compelling Evidence from Children Who Remember Past Lives* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), p. 26.

¹⁶ Graves to the author 15 November 1972. Robert Graves Collection, The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York. The letter is unprocessed (12 May 2022).

¹⁷ Vera Alder, *The Fifth Dimension* (London: Rider, 1940).

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- ¹⁸ *Complete Poems* (p. 363): Perhaps he was contacting the Akashic Record, referred to by Rudolf Steiner, in which all memories are stored in the aether.
- ¹⁹ Raine to the author, 1985 (private collection).
- ²⁰ See for example his *The Garden of Love*, in which ‘priests in black gowns were walking their rounds, | And binding with briars my joys and desires’, (*Songs of Experience*, 1794) <<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-blake-39/blakes-songs-innocence-experience>> [accessed 12 May 2022]
- ²¹ Robert Graves, *The Golden Fleece* (London: Cassell, 1944).
- ²² James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (London: Macmillan, 1890).
- ²³ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historic Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber, 1948).
- ²⁴ Creative Age published in order of appearance: *Wife to Mr. Milton* (1944), *Hercules, My Shipmate*, the American title of *The Golden Fleece* (1944), *Poems 1938-1945* (1946), *The White Goddess* (1948), *Watch the North Wind Rise*, the American title of *Seven Days in New Crete* (1949), and *Occupation: Writer* (1950).
- ²⁵ Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves: His Life and Works* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 419.
- ²⁶ Eileen Garrett, *Many Voices* (New York: Putnam, 1968), p. 146.
- ²⁷ Betty Shine, *Mind to Mind* (London: Bantam, 1989), p. 40.
- ²⁸ Robert Graves to the author 15 November 1969. The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo. The letter is as yet unprocessed (12 May 2022).
- ²⁹ Lynne McTaggart, *The Field* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), pp. 46, 149, 163.
- ³⁰ Rupert Sheldrake, *A New Science of Life* (London: Granada, 1983), p. 28.
- ³¹ Omar Ali-Shah and his brother claimed to have a manuscript of the Persian poem older and more correct than the one Edward Fitzgerald had seen, but never provided it to Graves who worked from an English crib, which they also provided. See Sara Greaves, ‘Mythopoetic Hospitality’ in this issue. Robert Graves and Ali Shah, *The Rubayyat of Omar Khayaam* (London, Cassell, 1967).
- ³² Robert Graves and Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Myths* (London, Cassell, 1964).
- ³³ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* amended and enlarged edn (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966), pp. 484-85.
- ³⁴ Seymour-Smith, p. 116; *Good-Bye*, p. 410.
- ³⁵ Several major accidents have occurred; these include but are not limited to: Windscale (UK) 1957; and Kyshtym (Russia) 1957; Three Mile Island

(USA) 1979; Chernobyl (Ukraine, then Ukraine SSR) 1986; Fukushima (Japan) 2011. In addition, damaging effects on genetics have been covered up and denied by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and warnings ignored. At Fukushima (2011), meltdowns in three reactors continue, completely out of control after ten years, and thousands of fish and birds have died as the Pacific Ocean is polluted with lethal manmade radioactive isotopes, while in New Mexico, buried drums of Plutonium are exploding. Gayle Greene, 'Science with a Skew: The Nuclear Power Industry after Chernobyl and Fukushima', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 10 (2012)<<https://ratical.org/radiation/radioactivity/ScienceWithASkew.html>> [accessed 29 January 2022]

³⁶ Howard Kohn, *Who Killed Karen Silkwood* (New York: Summit 1981); Rosalie Bertell, *No Immediate Danger* (London: Women's Press 1985).

³⁷ Robert Green, *A Thorn in Their Side* (London: John Blake Publishing, 2011), covering the murder of his aunt, Hilda Murrell, and his own persecution by agents of the nuclear industry.

³⁸ Catherine R. Dalton, *Without Hardware* (Canberra: Nicholson Publishing, 1970), p. 213. Graves wrote the preface. The last of the 124 footnotes is a letter from Graves's first wife, Nancy Nicholson (January 1968), in which he gives his reason for visiting Catherine at her home in Australia: 'I went there half-persuaded by Jenny [his elder daughter] that Catherine had gone round the bend, but by very careful check-ups with the grandchildren [...] I came to the conclusion that she has been completely accurate in her statements, and has one of the most extraordinary minds, as well as the most enormous courage of anyone I have met for years'.

Robert Graves's Mythopoetic Hospitality: Translating *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayaam*

Sara Greaves

Abstract: This article draws on poetry criticism, translation studies and, briefly, hospitality studies to revisit the controversial translation of *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam* by Robert Graves and Omar Ali-Shah. Graves took an interest in Sufism, especially as a 'force of mental power which could be created by telepathic communication' and worked together with the Shah brothers to dislodge Fitzgerald's nineteenth-century best-selling version and replace it with what was intended to be a founding text of twentieth-century Western Sufism, a 'secondary original'. Nevertheless, the poet polymath had his own agenda, an act of mythopoetic hospitality that the controversy should not be allowed to overshadow.

Keywords: translation studies, hospitality, mythopoetics, secondary original, Omar Khayyam, the Goddess

This paper started out as a curious reaction to a literary hoax: the strange case of a translation based on an inauthentic original, published and defended by a distinguished English writer. When I first read about it, I thought of two things: Borges's short story 'Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*',¹ in which the protagonist, a scholar, passes off as a translation what is in fact an exact copy in the original seventeenth-century Spanish of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*; and Boris Vian's pitching certain of his novels, as translations of American works of fiction – further complicated by his assuming the *nom de plume* of Vernon Sullivan. This literary hoax (*The Rubaiyyat*) had the added complexity of being unintentional on the part of one of the authors, and of involving a third party, the would-be owners of a non-existent text, the brothers Idries and Omar Ali-Shah. The translation of *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayaam*,

published in 1967 and jointly credited to Robert Graves and Omar Ali-Shah, was the result of the self-misrepresentation of these two Sufi proselytes as descendants of the Prophet and the custodians of an 800-year-old manuscript of the great Persian astronomer-poet, Omar Khayyam. Graves, then in his seventies, took the brothers at their word, agreed to help (re)claim Khayyam as a Sufi poet, and worked from the English crib he was given, never seeing the original text. When controversy arose, Graves asked for the manuscript to be produced; he met with excuses and put-offs; the Shahs even refused their father's request to produce the manuscript. No manuscript was ever produced for in all likelihood no manuscript ever existed.²

This intriguing tale raises all kinds of questions, and in particular: how could Graves have been so easily fooled? What kind of East-West intercultural exchange was at play between the British mythologizer-poet and the (British-raised) Afghan brothers, and the early twelfth-century poet Omar Khayyam? Or between the North and the South, with relation to Graves's interest in the Mediterranean influence on Northern, Celtic mythology?³ What can it tell us about hospitality, about hospitality in the Mediterranean, about, perhaps, a 're-membering' hospitality appropriate to Robert Graves's mythopoetic approach? To attempt to answer these questions, I will elucidate some of the circumstances surrounding the translation, and add a few comments on the translated text, with reference to the manuscript drafts curated by St John's College, Oxford. Finally I will discuss the notion of mythopoetic hospitality in connection with Robert Graves's poetic stance.

The Rubaiyyat in Context

Graves was a prolific writer: in addition to poetry, he wrote novels and essays, an influential memoir, *Good-Bye to All That* (1929), prose nonfiction on a range of subjects, most famously *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948), and numerous classical translations. His historical novels, *I Claudius* (1934), and *Claudius The God* (1934), reached a wide audience

through the television adaptation by the BBC (1976). He seemed prone to attract if not actually seek controversy, with for example his rewriting of Dickens in *The Real David Copperfield* (1933), his attack on the poet John Milton in *Wife to Mr Milton* (1943), rewriting the Nazarene Gospel in *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* (1953), and of course his attacks on contemporary poets in *The Crowning Privilege* (1955). When *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayaam* was published, in 1967, its controversial reception must have seemed to follow a familiar pattern; however, the tone of his detractors was more severe; Graves and his collaborator Omar Ali-Shah were accused of fraud. Possibly it cost him the poet laureateship.⁴

Idries Shah (1924-1996) was clearly a very charming, convincing man. He had already persuaded John Bennett, a disciple of the mystical teacher Gurdjieff, to hand over the seven-acre property at Coombe Springs, in Surrey, where Bennett had founded his 'Institute for the Comparative Study of History, Philosophy and the Sciences', and before long Graves was recommending his friends and family to defer to Shah as guide and healer. Agreeing to further his self-promotion as a Sufi leader in the West, Graves helped with the publication of Shah's book *The Sufis*, in 1964,⁵ to which he wrote the preface. James Moore, in an article that thoroughly debunks the self-made myth of Idries Ali-Shah as a great Sufi leader from the East, quoting enthusiasts such as Graves and Doris Lessing, inventories his methods, including that of 'creative genealogy',⁶ recklessly adopted by Graves as follows: 'Idries Shah Sayed happens to be in the senior male line of descent from the prophet Mohammed, and to have inherited the secret mysteries from the Caliphs, his ancestors. He is, in fact, a Grand Sheikh of the Sufi Tariqa'.⁷

When Idries's brother Omar appeared in Mallorca, with his offer to collaborate on a translation of Khayyam, Graves was thus already primed for the encounter, ready to trust him, and he understandably gave Omar a warm welcome. However, Miranda Seymour notes that Graves's interest in Sufism pre-dated his connection with Idries, and that the latter would not have had much to teach him. Sufism to Graves was the acknowledgement of a 'force of mental power

which could be created by telepathic communication', meaning that the Sufis shared his view of the powerful force for good that could be created when poet and muse were harnessed together (Seymour, p. 400). As with Laura Riding and Goddess-worship, Seymour contends, Graves was not under the influence of these personalities; rather his hospitable, mythopoetic embrace welcomed their talent as actors to play the parts he needed them to play, in much the same way as he wrote *The White Goddess*.⁸ 'The mythology of *The White Goddess*, though its elements are drawn from a vast field of ancient story and legends, is in its assemblage Graves's own creation, and conforms to the requirements of his own poetic mind.'⁹

Graves, we can thus infer, had his own agenda. But, before we turn to the translated quatrains, a little more must be said about Shah's offer and its reception and outcome. It should be pointed out that as well as the work on the translation, the intermediary of Graves would also open up to Omar an English publisher for it, first Cassell in 1967 and then Penguin from 1972. Also, although Omar Shah was Graves's guest in Mallorca, as his brother had been before him, Graves behaved rather as if he was the receiver and declared himself honoured to be asked to collaborate on what he believed to be an important realisation, at last correcting for the English reading public the biased view of Khayyam that had been propagated since Victorian times by translator Edward Fitzgerald: 'To be entrusted with this task was the greatest poetic compliment that I had ever been paid'.¹⁰ Fitzgerald's *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, published in 1858, had long become 'a classic of English literature'.¹¹ By his own account Fitzgerald took liberties with the source text, famously defending his translation method as follows: 'Better a live sparrow than a stuffed eagle'.¹² By contrast with Fitzgerald's portrayal of Omar Khayyam as a free-thinking hedonist, inciting his readers to 'eat drink and be merry', and his poem as 'a drunkard's rambling profession of the hedonistic creed' (Fitz-Omar Cult, p. 8), henceforth the Persian poet would be portrayed faithfully, through this new translation based on an authentic manuscript, as a Sufi mystic. But, more importantly, translating (or rather making poetry from a translation of) Omar Khayyam would also give Graves

the means to embody and promote a theme of his own: one of his potent historico-mythological intuitions concerning the mythological genealogy of Gaelic folklore in the Mediterranean:

My intuitions of [Khayyam's] hidden meanings were prompted less by contrastive studies of Hebrew and Gnostic mysticism than by a sense of kinship which I felt with medieval Irish poets who, as scholars now recognize, had come under Sufic influence as early as the 8th and 9th centuries.¹³

The prospect of translating Khayyam as a Sufi mystic may have felt like finding the missing piece of a puzzle, and Ali-Shah's request for his help was thus a powerful object of seduction. Back in British academic circles, however, when the translation was published, the authenticity – the existence even – of the source text was contested, described as a 'clumsy forgery' by Orientalist T. L. Elwell-Sutton, former emeritus Professor in Persian at Edinburgh University,¹⁴ and decried by Major J. C. E. Bowen, who even travelled to Afghanistan to track down the elusive manuscript.¹⁵ Not only was Graves's reputation as a serious writer in jeopardy, there were also threats of legal action as he had denigrated Elwell-Sutton's Persian credentials and risked being sued for libel by *Life*.¹⁶ For the ensuing three years Omar Shah took pains to shore up Graves's confidence in the existence of the manuscript, and for a while Graves relished the fun of mocking the establishment. Referring to the academics as 'baying or whining mongrels', Shah wrote to Graves:

They will undoubtedly keep up their attacks, put them on record and fall all the harder when the full situation and documentation is published. The timing of this blockbuster is now in my father's hands but as and when it does come it will be diverting!¹⁷

However, this day never came and neither the manuscript nor any copy or reference or location was ever found; tension mounted until 1970, when Idries seems finally to have confessed to the

hoax,¹⁸ and it was rapidly recognised that Shah's crib was based on the manuscripts used by Fitzgerald.¹⁹ Yet Graves did not withdraw his friendship from the Shahs, as if there had been no betrayal, any more than he had turned against Laura Riding.

Graves, from what I have learnt of him, was quite capable of acts of pure generosity such as taking on this translation; it would seem nonetheless that the poet welcomed the request with a mind to furthering his own interest in Sufism, and, more broadly, to endorsing 'his new, muse-ridden way of life', meaning a life devoted to poetry that is dependent on love for and shared by a female muse.²⁰ What then can be learned from the study of the translated text and the draft manuscripts with relation to Graves's mythopoeics?

A Delicate, Didactic, Feminised Version of *The Rubaiyyat*

The first thing to be said about Graves's approach to this translation project is that he went about it very seriously, repeatedly revising his manuscripts, and several drafts of the quatrains can be consulted in the Robert Graves archive at St John's College Oxford. Unlike Fitzgerald's quatrains with their exacting rhyme scheme based on that of the Persian rubaiyat (a-a-b-a), Graves's quatrains are unrhymed, relying for their musicality on internal sound patterning and occasional half rhymes, and while Fitzgerald's pentameters are invariably regular, Graves's fall less neatly on the ear and instil tension between the speaking voice and the prosodic frame. Similarly, Fitzgerald's archaic capitalisation has been abandoned, although certain common nouns remain capitalised, words such as 'Rose', 'Fate', 'Way' and 'Guide', suggestive perhaps of an esoteric symbolism. Here is a comparison of their translations of the opening quatrain, Fitzgerald's first:

Awake! For Morning in the Bowl of Night
Has flung the Stone that puts the Stars to Flight:
And Lo! The Hunter of the East has caught
The Sultân's Turret in a Noose of Light.²¹

While Dawn, Day's herald straddling the whole sky,
Offers the drowsy world a toast 'To Wine',
The Sun spills early gold on city roofs –
Day's regal Host, replenishing his jug. (p. 45)

The manuscripts show Graves reaching for delicacy of diction, gradually divesting his language of his more sumptuous or ostentatious early versions, often opting for a gentler, less semantically rich word or image than he had at first chosen and avoiding percussive alliteration in favour of soft discreet consonantal echoes. The following is quatrain no. 3 in Graves and Ali-Shah's version, extracted from one of the typescripts,²² in which the cumbersome 'dawn draught' has been replaced by the lighter, simpler 'dawn drink'.

" Loud crows the cock for his dawn ~~draught~~ ^{drink}, my Saki! "
" Here stand we in the vintners' Row; my Saki! "
" Is this an hour for prayer? Silence, my Saki! "
Defy old custom, Saki; drink your fill! "

The Rubaiyyat typescript, St. John's University.

Similarly, in quatrain no. 17 the first line reads: 'This ruined caravanserai called Earth', with earlier versions showing a hesitation between a general characteristic, 'ruinous', and the transitive, ostentatious 'battered' (which was Fitzgerald's choice: 'Think, in this batter'd Caravanserai', no. 16).²³ Graves's 'ruined' has a familiar ring, with both religious and financial connotations, unobtrusively attenuating the orientalist cliché ('caravanserai') and creating a new poetic image of the ephemeral nature of political power (reminiscent of Shelley's 'Ozymandias'); an effect that is subtly heightened by the echo of 'n' in 'ruined' and 'caravanserai'. It is noteworthy also that Graves brings in the tenor of the metaphor in *praesentia* ('Earth'), guiding the reader, in keeping with his didactic intent, to apprehend the image within the unit of the line.

The drafts reveal the poet gradually breathing a quieter, more sensory intimacy into the quatrains by softening the brassiness of his early versions. Thus, we observe an evolution from ‘the lion slumbers’ to ‘the lion snores’, and finally to ‘the lion nods’ in the printed version (no. 18), which is less rich and sonorous, more gentle; or from ‘Leaping all obstacles but Fate’s decree’ to ‘Leaping all obstacles but Fate’s design’ (no. 34), in which the formal, administrative term is dropped in favour of the more allusive, aesthetic and intimate ‘design’, which hovers between ‘intention’ and ‘visual shape or pattern’. The attention to sound and prosody can be observed in quatrain no. 9: ‘Rest in the rose’s shade, though winds have burst | A world of blossom’, which in earlier versions read as follows: ‘Sit in the rose’s shade, for winds have burst | A world of blossom’. The auditory quality of ‘rest’ invites the reader to linger under the rosebush, that of ‘though’ is a fuller sound than ‘for’, and the alliterative and assonantal effects of ‘rest | rose’ and ‘rose | though’ give a delicate substance to the lines. A similar search for bodily sensations can be observed in the following example, quatrain no. 6:²⁴

A glorious morning, neither hot nor ~~chill~~ ^{dark}
 with cheeks of roses newly bathed in dew; dark
6
 The nightingale, in ^{Pahlevi}, prescribes
 For every sallower cheek: "wine, wine and wine!"

The Rubaiyyat typescript, St. John’s University.

To a certain extent, this is the work of a translator writing in the biblical tradition of Saint Jerome or Martin Luther, transposing the source text into the vernacular and seeking not so much a heightened poeticism as to serve the ideas of the text through clear, delicate, and unostentatious language.²⁵ This aim can be seen as deriving from the same didactic urge as Graves and Alan Hodge’s book on good English, *The Reader Over Your Shoulder: A Handbook for*

Writers of English Prose.²⁶ Miranda Seymour writes that ‘as a handbook to style, it has never been bettered. But it was more than a grammar book in Graves’s mind. In the opening chapters, he suggests that lack of clarity in communication was a threat to the security of the country’,²⁷ a concern he shared with Laura Riding. There was no contradiction to Graves between intuitive mythology and the practice of muse-poetry, and clear thoughts in clear speech.

Similarly, he announced in ‘The Fitz-Omar Cult’, the Sufic interpretation is brought to the fore in the translation – ‘a corrective presentation of the true Khayaam’ – (p. 29), as can be seen in quatrains such as nos. 25, 47 or 55. Here, for instance, is Graves’s no. 25, followed by Fitzgerald’s:

Some ponder long on doctrine and belief,
Some teeter between certitude and doubt.
Suddenly out of hiding leaps the Guide
With: ‘Fools, the Way is neither that nor this’. (p. 49)

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great Argument
About it and about; but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went. (p. 86)

Whereas Fitzgerald’s speaker seems unimpressed by theological and philosophical speculation, Graves presents us with a hidden ‘Guide’ and a ‘Way’ to be followed. Nevertheless, the free-thinking quatrains expressing scepticism – those seemingly written by Khayyam, who was obsessed with death and despaired of his vast knowledge ever solving the mystery of human life – are neither suppressed nor embellished or euphemised by Graves, but are starkly blunt in their matter-of-factness, as in the final line of quatrain no. 42:

Raise the bowl high, like tulip-cups at Nauroz,
And if the moon-faced one has time to spare
Drink gloriously deep, for brutal Time

Will strike you down with never a warning yell. (p. 53)

It should be recalled here that much uncertainty still surrounds the paternity of the rubaiyat. Of the 1500 quatrains that exist, only about a hundred seem to stand together as a coherent work of a single author, according to Persian scholar Leili Avnar.²⁸ She places these poems on the diachronic spectrum of Persian poetry between the earlier Bacchic verse in praise of wine, with its strong Zoroastrian influence, and the later Sufi poetry such as that of the poet Rumi, for whom wine was no longer a reality to be indulged in but purely symbolic. Yet throughout Persian poetry, Avnar maintains, the wine that is such a prevalent protean element in Khayaam's *Rubaiyat*, with the tavern toper being repeatedly called upon to pour it into clay bowls, whether to drown one's sorrows or as a metaphor for the divine word, at the same time stands for poetic inspiration. It takes the poet through the trials and tribulations of the body and the soul, through the elemental matters of life and death, origin and destination, enabling the poet in a state of wine-induced intoxication or ecstasy to receive and relay downwards the divine word.

This approach to Persian poetry and the view of Khayaam as a transitional voice, part Sufi, part materialist freethinker (and as such exceedingly rare in the Muslim world; and comparable, it is sometimes observed, with François Rabelais), may lead us to wonder whether in this translation Graves appropriates the cult of wine as a substitute for the cult of the Goddess, while surreptitiously paying tribute to her wherever possible. The prototypical White Goddess, his version of one of the Celtic goddesses, was for Graves the principal source of mythopoetic inspiration:

My thesis is that the language of poetic myth anciently current in the Mediterranean and Northern Europe was a magical language bound up with popular religious ceremonies in honour of the Moon-goddess, or Muse, some of them dating from the Old Stone Age, and that this remains the language of true poetry. (*White Goddess*, p. 10)

Indeed, whereas Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat* presents a male fraternity of fellow wine drinkers, Graves introduces feminine elements. He thus replaces Fitzgerald's 'That every Hyacinth the Garden wears | Dropt in its Lap from some once lovely Head' (no. 18)²⁹ with 'While scented violets, rising from black soil, | Record the burial of some lovely girl' (no.19)³⁰; uses feminine possessive pronouns for the moon (nos. 8 and 55) or for Fate (no. 15); and we recall that one possible etymological derivation of 'Sufi' is the Greek *sophia*, meaning wisdom but also a woman's name.

Similarly, while sensuality is largely absent from Khayaam's quatrains,³¹ which are emphatically not love poems,³² Graves emphasizes the threefold nature of the goddess as maiden, mother and crone, or layer-out (or: ecstasy, origin, and destination), through poetic effects such as paronomasia, or through a sensual suggestiveness in the nature imagery. Quatrain 23, for instance, with 'womb' and 'tomb' and 'live and love', seems to encapsulate this feminine trinity that Graves maintains provided the basis of the matriarchal order that preceded the patriarchal religions in the proto-Mediterranean world, and beyond:

Rise up, why mourn this transient world of men?
 Pass your whole life in gratitude and joy.
 Had humankind been freed from womb and tomb,
 When would your turn have come to live and love? (p. 49)

Instead of epicureanism, the stanza seems a discreet, unobtrusive apology for muse worship.

It seems sad that the beauty of some of these quatrains should have been so overshadowed by the controversy of the non-existent manuscript. However, this controversy may have seemed to Graves almost a petty irrelevance, while to the mythopoetic poet hospitality is primordial. Unlike the *poète maudit*, the paradigmatic outsider, the mythopoetic poet is everywhere at home, and everywhere potentially both host and guest. So, it comes about that, while hosting what was to become an authorized Sufi text for the West, at a time (the late sixties) of great interest in Eastern philosophies

and esoteric communities, Graves was at the same time a guest, who had, as it were, entered a new space. What then does this reciprocal mythopoetic hospitality consist in?

Mythopoetic Hospitality

This new hospitable space entered by Graves perhaps owes something to its Mediterranean setting. From a historical or anthropological point of view, the Mediterranean, as Fernand Braudel famously pointed out, refers not to a sea but to the inhabitants of its shores, where ‘everything centred on trade, which was omnipresent, primordial and organisational’.³³ Fifty years later, in an article on the subject of trading networks in the Mediterranean space, the historian Francesca Trivellato raises the question of trust, of how and why merchants of different languages and cultures, perceived as radically other and therefore as untrustworthy, were able to overcome their prejudices and respect their commercial commitments.³⁴ Could it be then that trust is a fundamental value in the Mediterranean, on which not only commerce but also hospitality is founded? In his article ‘Reinventing Hospitality’, Claude Raffestin distinguishes between inside and outside spaces, between the sedentary home, city or nation, with its rules and codified customs, and the nomadic, fluid, non-semiotised exterior, and emphasises the notion of reciprocity, blurring the distinction between host and guest:

Hospitality can be conceived as knowledge of a mode of practice with the Other that a person has through themselves. The host – the person in a sedentary position, therefore – is in fact a migrant, a latent stranger, whereas the guest, who is thus in a nomadic position, is in fact potentially sedentary.³⁵

These two functions, or spaces, which are brought to interconnect through the ritualised mechanism of hospitality, form a semiosphere, Raffestin claims, in which meaning can be revitalised or renewed, and in Graves’s case perhaps, appropriated.³⁶ Hospitality is also an

abiding metaphor for translation. Before being the language of Europe, as Umberto Eco claims,³⁷ translation was surely the language of the Mediterranean, which he describes as a form of negotiation,³⁸ involving not the counting but the weighing out of words (Cicero).³⁹ Antoine Berman (among others) theorizes rather that translation amounts to a form of hospitality.⁴⁰ As we endeavour to glimpse the text behind the controversy, these notions of trust, hospitality, commercial transactions as well as those of the ‘secondary original’ and mythopoetic translation, all jostle together on the island of Mallorca in a multifaceted exemplum of Mediterranean hospitality.

In hospitality, as Raffestin suggests and as the French word ‘*hôte*’, used for both senses, irresistibly recalls, host and guest are notoriously interchangeable. Through Ali-Shah and his would-be distinguished lineage, it can also be said that the Sufic tradition was extending hospitality to Graves, enabling the English poet (before postcolonial studies emerged in academia) to collaborate on a sort of Orientalist reversal or postcolonial ‘writing-back’.⁴¹ Fitzgerald is often cited as an example of Victorian Orientalist translation, and the Shah brothers’ purpose was to oust his freely-translated best-selling poems and their materialist, atheistic hedonism, and establish a new ‘secondary original’, to borrow a very interesting concept from Henri Meschonnic,⁴² that is, an authoritative version of what to them was not so much poetry as a sacred text, which would quell doubts about Khayyam’s authorship, and provide a text upon which to found the Sufic way in the West. What is interesting is that despite the scandal of the non-existent original, which would seem to annul and discredit the entire project, the Shahs cannot be said to have failed since Sufism continues to thrive in the West,⁴³ and Sufi followers such as Doris Lessing unshaken by the controversy. Nor did Graves play an entirely losing hand.

Graves’s most striking display of hospitality to the influence of others was his relationship with the American poet Laura Riding, with whom he and his wife first formed a *ménage à trois* and around whom, first in England and later in Mallorca, he created a sort of cult to the female deity of primitive matriarchies, with Riding in

the role of the Goddess. Such was his subservient attitude that, when the couple first arrived at Deyá, the Spanish villagers assumed him to be the butler of a demanding aristocrat. Her own idea of herself as an exceptional woman poet with supernatural powers was fully accepted by Graves, and he was determined that other people should worship her too. This poetic ‘hospitality’ helps to explain how Graves came to be ‘stung’, as James Moore put it, by the Shah brothers and also why, ultimately, on a certain level at least, he remained untroubled. For more important than being the object of deceit, no doubt, was the principle of mythopoetic hospitality, of bringing texts and people under his own capacious roof in the mountain-surrounded valley of Deyá, plying them with the gifts of hospitality while submitting them in differing degrees to the violence of his own self-sacrifice to his muse; before releasing them, enriched with strange new knowledge and certain talismanic curios, back into the world.

Graves’s mythopoetic world would thus seem to have formed a ‘semiosphere’ in Raffestin’s sense of the word, in which material frontiers, whether in terms of sexual transgression, commercial transactions or textual authenticity were subjected to an immaterial spatial organisation, or mechanism, constantly engaged in translating the Other by means of its own code. Certain women, for instance, were translated into muses or wives; modestly talented people were magnified into geniuses; only a handful of poets were held as true muse-poets. Translation is the central action of the semiosphere, and its nature, as far as Graves is concerned, was to domesticate, to appropriate, to gather diverse strands into his own coherent system, whose sole function was to nurture poetic practice. Thus, it went with the Khayyam translation: (mis)appropriated by Sufi proselytism on the one hand, by bardic muse-poetry on the other, its importance to Graves was more probably elsewhere: in the poetic practice it called forth and of which the drafts are the written or printed trace.

I would like to thank the library at St. John’s Oxford for permission to consult The Robert Graves Collection, and The Robert Graves Trust for permission to quote from Graves’s work.

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NOTES

¹ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Pierre Menard, autor del *Quijote*’, in *Ficciones* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sur, 1944).

² Michel Pharand, ‘“In the Irish-Sufic Tradition”: Robert Graves and Idries Shah’, *Gravesiana: The Journal of the Robert Graves Society*, 1 (June 1997), 305-17 (pp. 314-315).

³ ‘Graves also found in Sufism a striking parallel with Celtic mythology: “The Irish Muse-goddess Bridget was threefold like the Muse celebrated by Ibn El Arrabi [the Sufi master poet, 1165-1240]”’, Pharand, p. 307.

⁴ ‘In January 1968, rallying from the disappointing discovery that Cecil Day-Lewis was, after all, to be the new Poet Laureate, he retreated into academic speculation.’ Miranda Seymour, *Robert Graves: Life on the Edge* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 445.

⁵ A renowned work on the subject, with a recent French translation: Idries Shah, *Les soufis*, trans. Jean Néaume (Paris: Le courrier du livre, 2014).

⁶ James Moore, ‘Neo-Sufism: The Case of Idries Shah’, *Religion Today* 3 (1986), 4-8 <<https://stottilien.com/literaturverzeichnis/neo-sufism-the-case-of-idries-shah-reprint/>> [accessed 7 July 2022]

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber & Faber, 1948).

⁹ J. M. Cohen, *Robert Graves: His Life and Work* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1960) quoted in ‘Robert Graves, 1895-1985’, Poetry Foundation <www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/robert-graves> [accessed 7 July 2022]

¹⁰ Robert Graves, ‘The Fitz-Omar Cult’, in *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam: A New Translation with Critical Commentaries by Robert Graves and Omar Ali-Shah*, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 7.

¹¹ Douglas Robinson, *Western Translation Theory: from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 249.

¹² Fitzgerald to E. B. Cowell. Cited in Robinson, p. 249.

¹³ Robert Graves, ‘My Version of the Rubaiyyat’, *Commentary*, 46 (July 1968) <<https://www.commentary.org/articles/robert-graves/translating-the-rubaiyyat/>> [accessed 8 July 2022]

¹⁴ Quoted in ‘Stuffed Eagle’, *Time*, 31 May 1968 <<https://web.archive.org/web/20090403053006/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,844564-1,00.html>> [accessed 8 July 2022]

¹⁵ John Charles Edward Bowen, *Translation or Travesty: Enquiry into Robert Graves’ Version of Some Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (Reading, England: Abbey Press, 1973).

¹⁶ Omar Ali-Shah to Robert Graves, undated, St John’s College, Oxford.

¹⁷ Omar Ali-Shah to Robert Graves, undated, St John’s College, Oxford.

¹⁸ James Moore, ‘As for poor Graves, his book was exposed by academics as a nullity cubed; a *translation* (which was not a translation but a copy of a Victorian commentary); of the twelfth century “Jan Fishan Khan MS” (which did not exist); of a composite stanzaic poem by Khayyam (which he did not write). As Graves laboured hopelessly to defend himself, Idries twice promised to produce the elusive MS ‘from Afghanistan’, only to renege finally on 30 October 1970. No MS, no photocopy, no detail of format or location, no substantive text, no colophon ever transpired – and Graves like Bennett reaped the harvest of his credulity’. James Moore, ‘Neo-Sufism: The Case of Idries Shah’, *Religion Today*, 3 (1986), 4-8 <<https://stottilien.com/literaturverzeichnis/neo-sufism-the-case-of-idries-shah-reprint/>> [accessed 8 July 2022]

¹⁹ Bahram Meghdadi, *A Comparative Analysis of Edward Fitzgerald’s and Robert Graves’s Translation of ‘The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam’* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

²⁰ Seymour, p. 399.

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- ²¹ ‘The Rubàiyàt of Omar Khayyam’, translated by Edward Fitzgerald, ed. by Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, included as an Appendix to *The Rubaiyyat*, p. 81.
- ²² Robert Graves Collection, St John’s College, Oxford.
- ²³ The quatrains are not numbered in the same way in the two translations.
- ²⁴ Robert Graves Collection, St John’s College, Oxford.
- ²⁵ Martin Seymour-Smith writes: ‘he sacrificed technical fluency to a sense he was persuaded was sacred’, quoted in Pharand, p. 556.
- ²⁶ Robert Graves and Allan Hodge, *The Reader Over Your Shoulder: A Handbook for Writers of English Prose* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1943).
- ²⁷ Seymour, p. 299.
- ²⁸ Leila Avnar, *Omar Khayyam et la tradition bachique persane*, a conference given at the Institut des Cultures d’Islam, online video recording YouTube, 12 October 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2vcLQHacJc>> [accessed 8 July 2022]
- ²⁹ Rubaiyyat, p. 84.
- ³⁰ Ibid, p. 48.
- ³¹ Nasser Pakdaman and others so assert. *Notes du Montroyal* <<https://www.notesdumontroyal.com/note/79>> [accessed 7 July 2022]
- ³² Pharand quotes a letter from Graves to Shah: ‘But that the divine love he felt for his friend from Shiraz was comrade love [...] without the least hint of bodily love, disappoints me. I had hoped it was love for a woman and would give a precedent for my impossible love for Aemilia and hers for me, which cannot be divorced from bodily love’. Pharand, p. 314.
- ³³ Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, 3 vols (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), i, 253, 292, cited by Anthony Molho and Diogo Ramada Curto, ‘Les réseaux marchands à l’époque moderne’. *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 58 (2003), 569-579 <<https://www.cairn.info/revue-Annales-2003-3-page-569.htm#no7>> [accessed 8 July 2022]
- ³⁴ Francesca Trivellato, ‘Juifs de Livourne, Italiens de Lisbonne, hindous de Goa. Réseaux marchands et échanges interculturels à l’époque moderne’, *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 58 (2003), 581-603.
- ³⁵ Claude Raffestin, ‘Réinventer l’hospitalité’, *Communications*, 65, (1997), 167 <https://www.persee.fr/doc/comm_0588-8018_1997_num_65_1_1997> [accessed 8 July 2022]. My translation.
- ³⁶ A notion borrowed from Yuri Lotman (1984) and developed by Raffestin.

³⁷ Umberto Eco, 'La Langue de L'Europe, c'est la traduction', *Montray Kréyol: depuis 2007*, <<http://www.montraykreyol.org/article/umberto-eco-la-langue-de-leurope-cest-la-traduction>> [accessed 8 July 2022]

³⁸ Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat: Translation as Negotiation* (London: Phoenix, 2004).

³⁹ 'I did not hold it necessary to render word for word, but I preserved the general style and force of the language. For I did not think I ought to count them out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were'. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *The Best Kind of Orator (De optimo genere oratorum*, 46 BCE). Translated by H. M. Hubbell, in Douglas Robinson, *Western Translation Theory: From Herodotus to Nietzsche* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 9.

⁴⁰ Antoine Berman, *La Traduction et la Lettre, ou l'Auberge du Lointain* (Paris: Seuil, 1991).

⁴¹ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989).

⁴² Western religious history reveals that the founding religious texts are frequently translations, which come to replace their source texts as what Henri Meschonnic calls 'secondary originals'. Henri Meschonnic, *Poétique du traduire* (Lagrasse, France: Verdier), 1999.

⁴³ Cf. The Idries Shah Foundation, a registered charity set up in 2013 by his family.

‘Like a Ghost at the Door’: Women’s World War I Poetry and a Gothic Home Front

Faith Ellington

Abstract: Though over a century old, Great War literature is only now being revisited in an effort to understand war experiences more fully. As Catharine Reilly, Margaret Higonnet and Keith Gandal, I seek to expand our literary knowledge of non-combatant First World War lives. This paper draws on English women’s poetry that captures their Great War experiences; while British women had different understandings of the war, many of their poems had an intense emphasis on the Gothic. I argue that Gothic overtones in these poems are used to ultimately cohere World War I British home front poetics into a haunted home front.

Keywords: World War I, poetry, women poets, the gothic, home front

When we conceptualise the Gothic, we might think of misty moors, decrepit homes, and dark secrets. And, of course, hauntings and ghosts often take their place as keystones of the Gothic genre. In this paper, I propose that World War I poetry written by women fits into the Gothic genre mould, while extending the idea of the haunted house to the haunted home front. While comparatively little research has interrogated women’s First World War poetry and verse, I draw on Catherine Reilly’s robust archival masterpiece *Scars Upon My Heart*, a collection of British women’s poetry written during or immediately after World War I. While obviously somewhat narrow in scope to Britain, these poems reflect an unshakeable unease and ghostliness that, I argue, lends itself to Gothic interpretations. While such a connection may seem apparent to readers interested in women’s experiences during the Great War, no scholar has yet to configure women’s First World War poetry

into Gothic valences. Through an exploration of how the Gothic illuminates women's First World War verse, a home front emerges that is united in its haunted qualities.

Paul Fussell's seminal text *The Great War and Modern Memory* was somewhat of a double-edged sword: while it brought harrowing, unforgettable male Anglophone poetry into scholarly debate, it also served male texts exclusively; in *Thank God for the Atom Bomb and Other Essays* he goes so far as to claim that women did not write 'good' war poetry because they were not 'the custodians of the subtlest sorts of antiwar irony'.¹ Scholars such as Reilly, Margaret Higonnet, Viv Newman, and Nosheen Khan take issue with Fussell's claim on a myriad of levels. As Rita Felski argues for a re-examination of the gender of modernity,² I argue that the non-combatant female experience is similarly integral to our understanding the era of the Great War. Underexplored depths emerge when revisiting women's World War I verse, far outside of the 'criticisms [...] against the quality of women's poetry, deemed to be uneven at best, doggerel at worst'.³ Similar work has been done by Higonnet in her Anglophone and non-Anglophone compilation of women's World War I writing, *Lines of Fire*. Newman and Khan have both made strides in the arena of women's World War I poetry, also drawing on the archival labour done by Catherine Reilly. Newman's landmark thesis 'Women's Poetry of the First World War' forcefully makes a case for examining poetry specifically written by women: 'women's poetry is often broader than men's, reflecting how warfare involves far more than writing about trenches and the camaraderie of those who live and die in battle'.⁴ What women poets could capture, even more accurately than many men at the time, were the psychological conditions of the home front. By examining their verse, and uncovering the Gothic valences therein, readers are able to reconfigure the home front not as a place of relative safety, but of psychological trauma.

The poems to be examined contend with ideas around *home*, unsurprising given British culture's temporary cleaving between *home front* and *front lines*. Women largely remained at home during the war, whether they were working, volunteering, farming, raising

children, or a combination of the above. So, it is no surprise that home and the home front are prominent haunted settings in poetry written by women during this era. Gothic and the home are by-and-large intertwined as Andrew Ng notes in his monograph *Women and Domestic Space in Contemporary Gothic Narratives*:

Throughout its tradition, the Gothic has consistently recognized a quality invested in domestic space that has the power to unnerve, fragment, and even destroy its inhabitant [...] The uncanny, in other words, points fundamentally to a shift in terms of the relationship between the house and its inhabitant, whether this shift is paranormally induced, or the result of more mundane circumstances such as familial conflict, a crime, or an unwelcomed intrusion.⁵

While the ghosts in these poems are not always as supernatural as they are grief-stricken, the shift in hauntings stems from Ng's noted conflict. The Female Gothic specifically is shaped by 'national identity, sexuality, language, race and history' and is ultimately about identity – both the author's identity and the female speakers'.⁶ As women were grappling with the emotional trauma of loved ones being killed, wounded, or missing in action, as well as the in-flux British socioeconomic scene, the home became a fraught battleground between inhabitant and structure, between inhabitant and grief. Put simply, for these women, every aspect of their lives was in some ways completely altered by the outbreak of the war, and, while not enduring the trauma of the front lines, they were still anchored to a home that felt hostile, haunted, and unrecognizable.

Teresa Hooley's most famous poem, 'A War Film', brings mental distress and imagined dead men into the domestic space. Unfortunately, Hooley's biographical background is scant, but we do know that she was British and had a decent number of poems published before the war.⁷ 'A War Film' describes a speaker who views war footage at the movies and returns home only to be confronted with the playful games of her young son. Instead of

being able to enjoy her child's company, she envisions him as a war casualty:

How could he know
 The sudden terror that assaulted me? [...]
 The body I had borne [...]
 Someday
 It should be taken away
 To War. Tortured, Torn.
 Slain.
 Rotting in No Man's Land, out in the rain –
 My little son....⁸

As the speaker persists in self-comforting gestures like speaking to and hugging her child, the poem concludes with these chilling lines:

I kissed and kissed and kissed him, crooning his name
 He thought that I was daft.
 He thought it was a game,
 And laughed and laughed.

This poem is curiously haunted by a person still alive; the ghost of the speaker's son appears before her eyes, yet he is not dead. Because of documentary footage and the explosion of the motion picture, civilian women in Britain would have a very accurate understanding of the war and its conditions; between 15 and 20 million watched one war documentary within its first six weeks being shown.⁹ Because of the speaker's understanding of World War I, she is haunted in multiplicity via cinema. She is haunted by the dead and the dying in the film she saw, and she is haunted by the seemingly unpreventable death of her 'little son'. Hooley's double haunting is of course sharpened by the realistic nature of the poem and the son's own ignorance. We as readers are also forced to imagine the young boy as already dead, since the speaker conveys her bleak vision through the first person. The usual safety of the bath, the

maternal care, and the domestic are completely upended by the brutality and ghost-like appearance of the dead in the speaker's family home. As the violence of the front lines intersects with the home front, sanctuary cannot exist in a domestic space or the speaker's own mentality.

A different kind of haunting occurs in the psychologically twisted 'Reported Missing', arguably Anna Gordon Keown's best-known work. Likely written when she was a teenager or a young woman, this eerie poem unsettles as it aches. When her loved one is reported missing, the speaker refuses to accept or even understand the devastating news; rather, she insists that she is incapable of thinking of her loved one as deceased. As people try to appeal logically to the speaker, she merely laughs, vowing instead that her love 'will come again'.¹⁰ She then moves on to an interior description:

There's purple lilac in your little room,
And somewhere out beyond the evening gloom
Small boys are culling summer watercress.
Of these familiar things I have no dread
Being so very sure you are not dead.

By intertwining the 'familiar' and 'dread', as well as pairing of the living greens in a dead man's room, Gordon Keown creates a portrait of the disrupted domestic, a home in which death is both unfathomable and inescapable. The pronoun 'your little' in this description hints at a parent-child relationship, made more apparent by the images of 'small boys' culling summer watercress. While the title of the poem indicates a soldier is missing, the speaker and her loved ones are grappling with a death, although it seems the death has not yet been declared. As John Stephens notes,

[i]f a soldier was posted as missing in action, it meant anxious uncertainty for relatives. It was bad enough to know that death was certain and to know the approximate location of the body, even if visiting the grave was out of the question. However, there was *far greater psychological*

distress about a loved one's fate if there was no certainty about death or the possible condition of the body [...] People took a long time to come to terms with the idea of a soldier who was missing – if they ever did at all (emphasis mine).¹¹

This suspension of death rituals and an inability to accept an absolute death creates a domestic space haunted by someone who is both missing and dead. Readers are placed in the role of the observer, understanding that the speaker's belief that her loved one will return safely is delusional. Because the speaker is intent on keeping her loved one alive, even keeping the room tidied and filled with living lilac, she creates a liminal space for a figure who is not allowed to be fully missing or fully deceased. Her mental grappling takes place in her familiar home setting, but she lacks control over her beloved's wellbeing; as she separates her home from 'your room', she further entrenches her loved one as a ghostly presence disturbing her ability to grieve and process such a clearly traumatic loss.

May Wedderburn Cannan posits a distraught female psyche inhabiting a domestic space in her poem 'Lamplight', written in 1916.¹² The poem begins with her attempt at conversation in which she describes her loved one's eyes as they (might) appear in her (or perhaps, previously, their) lamplit home.¹³ In distress, she says, 'Now in the quiet of a chill Winter's night | Your voice comes hushed to me | Full of forgotten memories'. The tercet suggests that this commonplace recollection may verge upon being an auditory hallucination because of the intensity and poignancy of her loss. Even the warm glow of the lamplight cannot dispel feelings of horror. Grief assumes the form of a gothic presence, a traumatic haunting in which the ordinary is transfigured as the extraordinary, and pleasure, pain. The psychological unease in the palpable presence of the beloved killed in the war, coupled with an inability to latch solidly onto reality in a once-familiar domestic space, exemplifies the female British Gothic experience of the First World War.

Ghosts are a more pressing reminder of death in Nora Griffiths' poem 'The Wykhamist'.¹⁴ Moving beyond personal loss is the poem

itself, which contends with wartime Britain and generalized death. The speaker takes ten lines to describe the setting, interspersing descriptors such as ‘pallid blooms’ with ‘the scroop of tortured gear on a battered car’.¹⁵ After scenic grounding, the speaker recounts her loved one’s abrupt transition from scholar to soldier and his subsequent death: ‘You ... “died of wounds” ... they told me’ (ellipses in original). Returning to the present, the speaker concludes, ‘... yet your feet | Pass with others down the twilit street’ (ellipses in original). Here, the speaker is physically outside of her domestic space, yet, she clearly feels a familiar sense of belonging on St Catherine’s Hill, the setting of the poem. The poet’s frequent use of ellipses evokes a sense of distraction and incompleteness, as if the speaker cannot verbalize or even quite comprehend the magnitude of her loss.

The haunting the speaker experiences is unavoidable as she attempts to process her grief. Andrew F. Hermann suggests that, when linking the supernatural and the self, ‘ghosts are often shattered love stories, and that is where their power of horror resides’.¹⁶ While we are not able to clearly understand the exact relationship between the Wykhamist and the speaker, this poem makes abundantly clear that the speaker and student / soldier loved one another very deeply. The horror of this poem lies ultimately in the unbridgeable gap between the living and the dead – as it does for male poets engaged in actual combat.¹⁷

The speaker of ‘London in War’ by Helen Dircks similarly points out how war trauma deprives one of the normal capacity to separate the living and the dead.¹⁸ ‘London in War’ weaves in and out of dreams and dream imagery as the female speaker grapples with the emotional trauma of war from her home:

I see the brightness
Through a throbbing gloom,
While a death rattles
To a tripping melody.¹⁹

The above lines describe the speaker's crossing and recrossing into a disturbed mental 'reality', and whether or not she is merely dreaming or experiencing an abnormal mental state is not made clear until the poem's last stanza. Dircks begins this stanza with the following lines: 'Night falls with its olden touch, | But sleep comes | Like a bloody man'. The speaker's mental anguish is jarringly juxtaposed with images of comfort ('brightness', 'melody') and compounded by horror ('gloom', 'death rattles', 'bloody man'). This juxtaposition generates a feeling of dread, culminating in the penultimate image of the poem: sleep as the grotesque form of a bloody man: an undeniable reference to the war's brutal violence. As the speaker is haunted by this bleeding figure, her home, London, becomes a place where even the release of sleep is psychologically unsafe. London as a metropolitan stronghold was a military target, thereby jeopardizing this woman's life. Her own mind similarly turns into an unsafe escape, making the speaker's home (city, body) feel doubly violated. World War I trench warfare literature makes clear that trenches were spaces that saw a complete breakdown of physical and mental order. The home front in this poem simulates this breakdown,²⁰ and thus the apparent distinction between soldier and non-combatant dissolves. Both soldier and non-combatant live under complex war conditions that produce trauma. Dircks' physical and mental breakdown, as evidenced by the poem's modulation toward the dreamlike and the unreal, combines with her physical exhaustion to trap her in a haunted paralysis. Dircks' poem exemplifies the instability of home, future, and culture that defines the Gothic.²¹

Poetry from this period often features women grappling with loss and hauntings within their own Gothic spaces and sometimes even inhabiting a physical space that is degraded and reduced to rubble. 'A Memory' by Margaret Sackville helps conceptualise Gothic rubble in the context of home front war poetry. Describing a town's only occupants, the town's dead, 'A Memory' is the aftershock of a bombing:²²

There was no sound at all, no crying in the village,
Nothing you would count as sound, that is, after the shells;

Only behind a wall the low sobbing of women,
The creaking of a door, a lost dog – nothing else.
Silence which might be felt, no pity in the silence,
Horrible, soft like blood.

After describing both male and female corpses, including the notable figure of a bayoneted woman, Sackville concludes her poem with the following lines: ‘Not by the battle fires, the shrapnel are we haunted; | Who shall deliver us from the memory of these dead?’. ‘A Memory’ was perhaps not personally experienced (though we cannot rule this out) but this poem is clearly working outside of the jingoist poetry of the era, evidenced by shock-value images of a bayoneted woman and corpses. Sackville’s ruined village would surely unnerve a non-combatant audience, since British civilians were at risk of bombings, and the anonymity of the ruined village allows the readers to imagine it as their own. Perhaps most crucially, Sackville emphasizes that it is not the ruined village that composes the most haunting part of this memory, it is the dead. While villages can be rebuilt, the dead are lost, returning only as ghosts.

The physical degradation of the home front appears as a motif in many poems written by women at this time.²³ As humans are able to build stability through structures, the built environment can ‘paradoxically be deathly to the human, yet simultaneously host to unnatural “life”’.²⁴ Unnatural life spawned in ruined spaces, whether that takes the form of ghosts or post-traumatic flashbacks, creates permanently disturbed domestic spaces. Whether or not homes may have remained intact, ghosts still arrived at the door.

Helen Hamilton explores the monstrous side of the Gothic while positing a political statement in her unequivocally titled poem ‘The Ghouls’. ‘The Ghouls’ explores monstrosity and human nature, with the speaker directing her address to a targeted ‘you’, being perpetrators of war:²⁵

Unknowingly you draw, it seems,
From their young bodies,
Dead young bodies,

Fresh life,
 New value,
 Now that yours are ebbing.
 You strange old ghouls,
 Who gloat with dulled old eyes,
 Over those lists,
 Those dreadful lists,
 Of young men dead.

While the portrayal of the ‘you’ is monstrous, Hamilton chooses to preface her accusatory remarks with the caveat that the ‘you’ acts ‘unknowingly ... it seems’. However, this subtlety only emphasizes the poem’s general extravagance, which comports with the Gothic. As Derek Lee points out, ‘there is nothing subtle about Gothic style – lack of nuance in fact, is the genre’s calling card’.²⁶ A genre-typical lack of nuance helps round out Fussell-esque protestations to Hamilton’s blunt poetry, as well as the other conspicuous ghosts present in this paper. Hamilton’s heavy use of repetition throughout the entire poem, particularly with ‘young’, ‘old’, and ‘ghouls’, then mimically suggests a kind of verbal haunting, again in keeping with the Gothic.

‘The Ghouls’ portrays women on the home front rebelling against the government and other war supporters who are depicted in classic Gothic imagery, draining the life from their young victims. Thus, we see Hamilton employing Gothic literary motifs as political satire, allowing the Gothic to take on protest valences, as well as its traditional elegiac role. Hence, the Gothic element in ‘The Ghouls’ helps to rebut the common mischaracterization of women’s World War I verse as jingoist and blindly war-supporting, a mischaracterization that recent scholarship is working to counter.²⁷

Hamilton’s poem echoes the social criticism in ‘The Dancers’ by Edith Sitwell, an accomplished poet. Sitwell creates a hellish world that is as bloody as it is frantic. Likely written about the decisively disastrous Battle of the Somme, ‘The Dancers’ contends with life on the British side of the channel, wryly thanking God that ‘we

still can dance, each night', while 'the floors are slippery with blood [... and soldiers] die hourly for us'.

The music has grown numb with death –
 But we will suck their dying breath,
 The whispered name they breathed to chance,
 To swell our music, make it loud
 That we may dance, – may dance.²⁸

In the vampiric imagery we see in Hamilton's 'The Ghouls', Sitwell invokes a transfer of life force in which civilians at home are drawing the 'dying breath[s]' from soldiers for their own pleasures. While Sitwell portrays the civilians as engaging in a supercilious dance, she also complicates her criticism by commenting that those on the home front are not in control of their own actions and are also deeply disturbed:

We are the dull blind carrion-fly
 [...]
 Mad from the horror of the light –
 The light is mad, too, flecked with blood, –
 We dance, we dance, each night.

While God is invoked in this poem, the divine figure ultimately seems apathetic to the hell on earth the dancers and soldiers are both experiencing. The psychological warping, in which both civilians at the home front and soldiers are cohesive – both in God's ambivalence and in their exchanging of breath/life force – speaks to Elaine Freedgood's psychological insight that 'ghost stories narrate the punishment of the guilty'.²⁹ Sitwell and the 'we' of home front civilians, many of whom were women, were bound under intense feelings of guilt. As war propaganda historian Jaap Van Ginneken explains:

A community of thinking does not, then, result from a herd instinct, but rather from a common responsibility (of a nation,

for instance) for past and present actions, at home or abroad. This is reflected in the consequences of war and the mood of people. *We flee our guilty feelings and repress our conscience*’ (emphasis mine).³⁰

Sitwell’s ‘we’ may be dancing, but this dance (in some mythic contexts, life-giving, and in general, refreshing or exciting) is a self-flagellating enactment of guilt-ridden trauma brought on by World War I. The ghostly figures of dying soldiers, who breathe life into those on the home front, only exacerbate the frenzy of self-punishment that these dancers enact, entering a Gothic realm of a horror-ridden dance floor where corpses charge dancers to keep up their movements under the bloody light of God.

The women war-poets I have treated in this discussion all express trauma on the home front during World War I. Ghosts haunt their lives and writings. Instead of limiting our conceptualization to the haunted home, we must also consider a haunted home front. The psychological trauma of being a civilian in an era in which non-combatants were targets, along with the hardship of losing loved ones – both men killed in battle and other women in air raids – was pervasive. Even though class and geography varied among these female writers, all were bound by the same home front civilian dangers. A clean division between safety and danger, between home front and front lines, did not exist, as noted by Heather Jones: ‘This myth of the Great War as a conflict that was limited spatially to the battlefield and to combatants is, of course, wrong’.³¹ Not only were these women poets engaging the ghosts in their own homes, but the ghosts that haunted their cities and towns, their times. As Jones plaintively notes, ‘the reality is that there are no reliable global statistics for how many civilians died in the First World War’.³²

Yet, reflections both contemporary to the time these poems were written and to today tend to underemphasise or completely disregard women’s wartime trauma, as Keith Gandal observes.³³ This misunderstanding might be rectified by examining women’s wartime poetry and the traumatic home front they present, and

considering the dire need that inspired them to resort to a Gothic lens to give proper voice to their experience.

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⁹ Seth Feldman, 'Battle of the Somme: What the Audience Saw', *Revue Canadienne D'Études Cinématographiques / Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, 27 (2018), 3.

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¹³ May Wedderburn Cannan, 'Lamplight', in *Scars*, p. 16.

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¹⁵ Nora Griffiths, 'The Wykhamist', in *Scars*, p. 44.

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BIOGRAPHY

Poetry and the Olympics, 1968 Mexico, Robert Graves

Vivian Holzer

Abstract: A memoir of Robert Graves's time in Mexico during the period of the 1968 Summer Olympics and of his friendship and long correspondence with the author.¹

Keywords: Games of the XIX Olympiad, Tlatelolco Massacre

First Encounter

He stepped out of the airplane with nonchalance. He seemed aloof and absent-minded, attracting attention because of his unusual and picturesque attire. He was very tall, wore shabby clothes and hid his messed-up curly silver hair under a broad-brimmed cordovan hat that covered his brow. His piercing grey eyes wandered through the crowd aimlessly. The crooked nose allowed me to unmistakably identify him as 'my poet'.

I had come to the airport to welcome Robert Graves, one of eleven poets invited to participate in a poetry symposium organized within the cultural program running simultaneously with the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. I just graduated that summer from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania and had returned to Mexico to my family. Having been away for several years, I was anxious to get involved in the exciting moment of the Olympic Games before going on to graduate school. The eyes of the world were on Mexico, and I wanted to be part of it!

The cultural program organised by the Mexican Government together with the Games was my door of entry. I applied for a position at the Olympic Committee and to my surprise, Oscar Urrutia, the person in charge of the program encompassing nineteen cultural events, asked me to help organise the poetry symposium. My double

major degree in Spanish literature and sociology gave me ideal credentials for the job. The idea was to invite all participating countries to have a poet write a text specifically for the Olympics, as well as to bring eleven renowned poets to Mexico to meet one another and participate in roundtables and other cultural events during their stay.²

My first task was to collect an anthology of verses paying tribute to the occasion and to prepare brief biographies of each of the guest poets. Aspiring to be a bit more ambitious, I decided to acquire some of their works and was busy making a selection of clippings based on my readings for future press releases. It was a laborious job, but I learned as much as I could about the authors before their arrival and became familiar with their writings.

Russian dissident writer Yevgeny Yevtushenko had visited Mexico several weeks before, at the time of the Prague Spring. He had drawn large crowds of young Mexicans with his message of freedom and lofty social ideals. His visit had been somewhat polemic, making the Mexican authorities anxious about his possible influence on student protesters who were already on the streets of Mexico City as part of the 1968 movement.

Robert Graves, representing England, was the first on my list to arrive. Robert Graves's writing was apolitical. His poetic contribution to the *Mexican Cultural Olympiad* was to be an ode to Enriqueta Basilio, the first woman ever chosen to carry the Olympic torch and light the flame for the opening of the Olympic Games.

I approached our visitor to explain who I was and that I was to take charge of him during his stay in Mexico. He acknowledged my introduction, and we moved through to an immigration desk. My first problem was to get him into the country without a visa. He had simply neglected to get one and I was finally able to convince the officer that he was a special guest of the Mexican government. We collected his luggage and walked to the exit.

My second problem appeared as we stepped out of the terminal. A good-looking woman rushed over to intercept us before we could get into my car. She pushed me aside, hugged 'Robert' and declared that she was taking him off to Santa Clara del Cobre in Michoacán to spend the few days prior to the Olympics in the company of good

friends of his who were expecting him. She assured me he would eventually come back in time for the opening ceremony.

I became upset. At all costs, I had to keep him with me and not have him disappear into unknown territory before his appearance at the Games. After that, he would be free to go wherever he pleased. I insisted that he must stay in Mexico City because he had no local currency and I needed to sort that out once he was settled at his hotel. The ‘intruder’ reluctantly agreed to let him remain in my custody and offered instead to host us for dinner at her home the following evening.

On our way to the city, Robert explained that the mysterious interloper was Pilar Pellicer, a famous Mexican actress, married to an old friend of his, James ‘Jimmy’ Metcalf, a sculptor who had made his home in Santa Clara because of the abundance of copper in the region. Jimmy and Pilar had visited Robert in Mallorca right after the war.

Our first conversation led me to understand a great irony: he had accepted the invitation to the poetry symposium only as an excuse. His real reason for coming to Mexico was to join his friends in experimenting with the local varieties of mushrooms and to walk through the ‘doors of paradise’. He had already been exposed to the effects of mushrooms on a former trip to Mexico, but then the doors remained shut. On this occasion however, he was convinced they would open, allowing him to enter and reach his nirvana. It sounded like a farfetched fantasy, but he was obsessed with carrying out this mission and I had to come up with an alternative project, lest I should lose my poet in his wild dreams of goddesses, mushrooms and adventures.

Getting Acquainted

My task was to keep him busy by interesting him in Mexico’s rich cultural history. I organised a visit to the famous Museum of Anthropology designed by Mexican architect Pedro Ramirez

Vazquez. It displayed a fabulous collection of idols and sculptures from the Maya, Aztec and other pre-Columbian civilizations.

As we walked through the rooms dedicated to the various Mesoamerican civilizations, he contemplated the works of art in silence. An outburst of comments followed. He drew parallels with the gods he knew from other polytheistic cultures and with the many concepts he could extrapolate from the classical world of the Greeks and the Romans with which he felt closely connected. He was intrigued with the female goddesses and the intricate rites of fertility surrounding them. A matriarchal society had existed in all these cultures and the female figures he saw at the museum coincided with his belief in the White Goddess who, like the Greek Hera, was the origin of human life.

A journey to the pyramids of Teotihuacan the following day awoke memories of the time he had spent teaching at the Royal Egyptian University in Cairo. He referred to legends and rituals and then began narrating stories with great enthusiasm, in a stream of consciousness. I had difficulty understanding him. He spoke rapidly, in a stilted speech, referring with familiarity to legendary characters from the past, whom he had made part of his inner world while considering them his best friends. I was fortunate to have had a classical education and could thus follow, or at least pretend to understand his complicated discourse.

I must have made an impression on him for he commented on the pleasure he felt in addressing an educated listener. At some point, I mentioned my Bryn Mawr background and the school's symbolic icon: the owl, a bird of wisdom whose huge eyes stare into the night absorbing and reflecting knowledge. The very next day, he handed me a handwritten page with two poems related to night owls that he had recently published, 'Arrears of Moonlight' and 'Like Owls'.

The blind are their own brothers, we
Form an obscure fraternity
Who, though not destitute of sight
Know ourselves doomed from birth to see,
Like owls, most clearly in half light.³

I had the feeling that his gesture was a mark of approval. In the many letters he would later write, the owl theme always appeared somewhere on the page. On 21 October 1968, he headed the letter 'Wanted: Owl eyes!' On 15 November 1968, he mentioned that someone wanted to reissue a magazine he published in 1920 called *The Owl* and signed off 'love to Bryn Mawr'!

Although no longer young, he still emanated incredible energy, which expressed itself as a will to share knowledge and to encompass the whole universe in every sentence. I was dazzled by the strength and the power of his rhetoric. He was physically vigorous and climbing up and down the Teotihuacán pyramids was easy. The result was the most dynamic combination of simultaneous thought and action in a single stroke.

Since I did not have a budget to entertain him for a whole week, I invited him home for lunch. I was living with my parents and figured he would appreciate a more intimate gathering where he could learn about another aspect of the Olympics. My father was the representative of the Omega brand of watches in Mexico. The firm had won the concession for timing the Games and my father was responsible for the process. There was new technology available: the industry had developed highly sensitive instruments that allowed for all sport results to be much more precise than before.

An improved technique for taking pictures permitted judges to record precisely each individual's performance.⁴ Also, for the first time electronic scoreboards kept track of the athletes and instantly informed the public on fifty-two illuminated screens distributed throughout the various venues. Throughout the lunch, Robert had to listen to a detailed account of how my father had come to order these scoreboards and all the technical problems he had encountered.

Robert became very excited listening to how the timing would function. It was like a jigsaw puzzle to him: all parts had to fit perfectly together. He knew many details about the Olympic Games and how they were organised in classical Greece every four years, but he had no clue how to run a modern Olympics with complicated technical advances. He asked question after question, and I felt relieved. I had succeeded in keeping him interested.

The following morning, we drove to Tepetzotlán, north of Mexico City, to visit a magnificent sixteenth-century late baroque monastery and its gilded altar, an example of the ornate *churriguesque* style that flourished in Mexico during the Spanish colonial period. He showed less interest in this as he was not a fan of the period and had an aversion to churches. His maternal family of German origin were Saxon country pastors and he had bad memories of his mother's push to have him attend religious services against his will. Visiting a convent was not his cup of tea.

However, after seeing the altar, he asked to go outside, through the cloisters leading to a courtyard with a small vegetable garden and an orchard. Here he was more in his element. He picked the shoots of a few plants, gathered some leaves, and then turned his attention to the wild roses. With a certain pride, he pointed out different species accompanied by their Latin name and place of origin. He then went on to indicate how hybrids were bred and later selected, relishing narrating to me the symbolism behind every flower, as well as its connection to particular Greek gods and goddesses (e.g. roses were identified with Aphrodite, the goddess of love), while he attributed other associations to the rest of the flora. He pointed out each species to demonstrate how many he recognised at a glance. He knew his plants and was delighted to give plenty of explanations. Discovering *vinca per vinca* (periwinkle) in the cloister was a great joy for him. He would write later:

Fennel stalks were used in the Greek Islands to carry the spark of fire in their pith [...] the song was about the vinca-per-vinca, or periwinkle, the *fiore de morte*, not the fennel (one eats). I love fennel. We use it for pickling our olives. *Feneuil* is the word here [...] *Feneuil mari* 'sea fennel' is pickled here as in King Lear's day.⁵

Several other letters refer to his gardening activities, to his yearly preparation of *quetsche* and crab apple jam in Deyá. Often he combined these references with mythological elements. For example: 9 April 1969. 'I have planted my pre-Columbian maize goddess

beside my maize potato and expect her to help – I should also have gotten a potato goddess’. And 4 August 1970: ‘An agave next door is just doing its star-turn of flowering and death, with countless bees as attendants. Mine did that two years ago after 40 years’. In another letter he said he would have liked to send me some of the flowers that were blooming in all their splendour in his garden, but flowers ‘travel badly’.

As we walked around the convent gardens, I listened in awe. There might have been a hint of flirtation as he spoke, but it didn’t go beyond that. He used figures of speech that were not offensive, and it didn’t occur to me that the elderly poet of love might have been pursuing me. I was flattered by his words, but focused on his passion for wildflowers, nature and gardening. I understood his preference for the outdoors as the main reason for his decision to live in Mallorca.

When we returned to the city, I suggested having lunch the next day with my parents’ neighbours and closest friends. I thought he would be interested in meeting Dr George Rosenkranz, a Hungarian organic chemist who had emigrated to Mexico and researched producing natural steroids from yams that were found in remote parts of Veracruz state. He had started experimenting with *cabeza de negro*, a black head yam, but had quickly replaced it with a related plant, *barbasco*, the root of which yielded hormones for the production of highly innovative drugs. In 1959 he had created the first synthetic contraceptive pill that led to fertility regulating treatment for women.

Robert was thrilled to learn about the properties of these yams. He intuitively understood the immense benefit the world was to derive from this scientific discovery. Women would be free to decide when they were ready to bear children. Their role in society would change as they attained new freedoms. For the first time, they could aspire to be on an equal footing with men.

He was enthralled with what he had learned. He cancelled plans to see his Morelia friends and the hallucinatory experience he had expected to undergo with ‘magic mushrooms’. He only wanted to learn more on the subject of the pill. Both lunches had been a success.

Oct 21st 1968

Just to say I got safe back after an adventureless voyage. All well at home ...

Home food tastes differently good, but of course the cooking can't claim comparison with the Holzer cooking, or even the Rosenkranz or the Urrutia sort, which is pretty good too.

During the considerable time we spent together, I was able to overcome my youth and naiveté, and Robert was pleased with the attention he was getting. He had become a friend and not just the famous writer I was to present at the Cultural Olympiad. The political turmoil that followed because of student unrest in the city, and the resulting climate of unexpected instability, strengthened the bond between us.

Activism in Mexico

In 1963, the International Olympic Committee selected Mexico to host the XIX Olympic Games, beating out Detroit, Lyons and Buenos Aires. At the time, the country was blessed with economic and political stability and experiencing a boom labelled 'the Mexican miracle'. The challenge to the country as host of the Games was to build stadia, athletic housing, rapid transit infrastructure and other massive construction projects that would show Mexico, the first developing country to host an Olympiad, to be an ideal site and the nation would benefit from the publicity and tourism that followed.

1968 was a moment of global change and uncertainty. France, Italy, Czechoslovakia, the United States and now Mexico were all faced with student protests and violent demonstrations triggered by a desire for more freedoms and a rejection of authoritarian systems of government. There was an underlying yearning to transform the status quo. The student-led uprisings in other parts of the world had inspired Mexican counterparts to take advantage of the coming

summer Olympics to pressure the government to meet their demands. The government wanted to showcase an image of efficiency, coordination and optimism at all costs, and to dismiss those who were made apprehensive by student unrest and street violence in the Spring of 1968.

This change in mood and the constant confrontations between students and authorities darkened the festive impression of Mexico that had been instrumental in its selection as a site for the Olympics. The unrest gained momentum. There were street fights, barricades, confrontations with the police and other demonstrations that made headlines around the world. People began to question whether Mexico was ready to receive the thousands of athletes, media representatives and tourists.

In addition, many Mexicans began to question whether the cost of hosting the events was too high for a country with extreme poverty. While the unrest continued to grow as the date for the inauguration approached, two massive marches to the main square in Mexico City (The *Zócalo*) on 13 August brought out between 150,000 and 300,000 demonstrators; a second march two weeks later, half a million. It was planned as a silent demonstration and promised to be non-violent, but some students entered the nearby cathedral, rang the church bells, and shouted insults towards the presidential palace (*Palacio Nacional*) in front of them.

President Díaz Ordaz decided that the disturbances were harming the country's image. He threatened to respond more aggressively to future demonstrations. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) began to consider cancelling the Games.

The Government tried, unsuccessfully, to impede media coverage of the disturbances but the situation had gotten out of hand. Demonstrations increased in subsequent weeks and the world saw Mexico City racked by violence, with an ineffectual police force unable to guarantee safety. On October 2nd, a largely peaceful concentration in the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* erupted into armed confrontation between the military and unarmed protesters; Mexican armed forces fired on the protesters resulting in numerous deaths.⁶ Following the so-called *Tlatelolco* massacre the Government took

even more repressive measures to quash student protests and portray Mexico as a country ready to host the nineteenth Olympiad.

Bowing to pressure, Díaz Ordaz cancelled the poetry symposium I was organizing. Nevertheless, he believed that the general unrest might result in a symbolic figure who would be supportive of the student demands and dreaded the possibility that one of the invited poets might assume that mantle. They were all world-renowned figures with high visibility, many of whom had supported similar causes abroad. He needed no foreign heroes to further inflame the situation.

I quickly made the appropriate changes and presented apologies to those who had been invited but had not yet arrived in Mexico. Among my group of poets: Odysseus Elytis of Greece had become ill and cancelled. León Felipe, who had organized weekly poetry recitals in Chapultepec Park as part of his contribution to culture in the city, died just a few days before the scheduled opening of the Symposium, and Bobi Jones, the Welsh poet who did make it to Mexico, had to be hospitalized soon after his arrival with food poisoning. Robert was already in Mexico, eager to participate in a Symposium that no longer existed. Without the symposium, I needed to arrange an agenda to keep him busy until the Games.

A New Approach: *Socios*

I sought the advice of my old philosophy professor, Dr Ramón Xirau, a Catalan exile from the Spanish Civil War, who was very well connected in the intellectual milieu. He suggested organizing readings in private homes, at cultural centres in and around Mexico City, at the British Council, at the Spanish Embassy, at the Anglo-American Cultural Institute and at Bellas Artes. People would attend these events by invitation only. Dr Xirau also put me in touch with members of the Mexican intelligentsia, including Agustín Yáñez, Jaime Torres Bodet, and Salvador Novo. I was very happy to receive a positive response from all of them and some even suggested hosting dinners and lunches at their homes.

Several other less well-known writers had appeared in town having heard about the poetry symposium. There was Octavio Amórtegui from Ecuador; Jorge Luis Morales from Puerto Rico, Franklin Morales from the Dominican Republic, Miguel Gomez Checa from Peru, William Howard Cohen, an activist poet from the United States, and some younger writers from different parts of Mexico. They had appeared at my office to make their presence known and to ask for inclusion in the official program of cultural events. They gave me examples of their work and by the end I had collected a stack of their literature. I agreed to add their poems to the printed anthology I was putting together. Although I hadn't planned individual readings for any of them, I decided to add them all to the program and in this way, at least, to have a larger group of writers.

Robert listened in silence as I explained this turn of events and what I was asking of him, then shared his concern about the gravity of the situation in Mexico and his sorrow at the cancellation of the Symposium. He kindly agreed to the Xirau proposal. As we spoke, he picked up a book of his collected poems which was lying on my desk with my name on it and with a smile added his own after mine, followed by the word *socios* (partners).

After Tlatelolco

Despite the Tlatelolco tragedy, Avery Brundage, President of the IOC declared that the Games would go ahead: The Mexican Government was guaranteeing an end to the violence and preparations were already far advanced. Mexican intellectuals disagreed with the decision. They believed that *Tlatelolco* was a major violation of human rights. They demanded that Díaz Ordaz cancel the Games. The most vocal critic of the Government's policies was Octavio Paz, who had abruptly resigned as Mexican Ambassador to India in protest on hearing of the massacre. In his famous resignation letter, he stated that although he had originally been invited to the poetry symposium, he had not contemplated attending, nor writing anything

on the subject of the Olympics. However, in a gesture of protest against what had occurred at *Tlatelolco* he had changed his mind and would now write a poem condemning the tragedy.

The poem appeared in the cultural supplement of the leftist magazine *Siempre* on October 30th, a few days after the end of the Olympiad. In it, Paz severely criticized the Government, both for the way it handled the demonstration and its attempts to cover up the bloodshed and deaths.

Although Ordaz claimed (falsely) that the Ambassador had been fired, Paz's poem and his public gesture against the Government made him the protest symbol Ordaz had tried to avoid.

My New Associate

Hours before the massacre on October 2nd, I took a busload of the visiting poets to a United Nations Youth Camp in *Cuernavaca*. Robert had agreed to tell us about his life and read poems in front of a very international young audience. He was used to this kind of event, and he immediately started telling us how he wanted it organized and how he wished to be introduced. He thought the biography I had prepared was too long, and conventional. He grabbed a scrap of paper and wrote down what he wanted to say.

Robert Graves was born in England. His family is of French origin – like the wine of that name – but settled in Ireland since 1575.

He fought in a Welsh Regiment in defence of France in 1914 – 1918. His father was Irish, his grandmother Scottish. His mother was German, but her mother came from a Norwegian family settled in Denmark.

He has lived in Spain since 1929 and is an adoptive son of his Spanish village. He can claim descent from the Prophet Mohammed by way of King Edward IV and King Alfonso II of Castille, who married the daughter of the last Moorish King of Cordoba, as by the way the Queen of England also can.

The unfortunate future non-appearance of eleven ‘world poets’ invited to the Games caused by a wave of international clamor has left Mr. Robert Graves as the only [player?] to support our own celebrated national poets.

Fortunately, however, his mixed blood allows him to represent several nations at once. Besides four nationalities of Great Britain; there is Germany, France, Denmark Norway and Spain.

He had an impulse to jot down whatever crossed his mind, and I began to collect these short notes in a folder. Sometimes there was a story attached, but mostly he would write down a few simple words with his fountain pen, omitting verbs and leaving half of the idea to be inferred. He covered the paper in all directions as if he were writing himself an *aide-mémoire* that only he could understand.

Love and the Poet

As on other occasions, Robert chattered non-stop in the bus all the way to Cuernavaca. He interacted briefly with the young Mexican poets in the group (Leopoldo Ayala, Jaime Sabines and Alejandro Aura), as well as with Carlos Bracho, the actor who played a role in the readings, but mostly he spoke to me about his life experiences. He told me about his muse, Julie, a young dancer from the Norwegian Ballet, who was his 16-year-old goddaughter. According to Robert, she was responsible for discovering the magic that existed between them. In turn, in accordance with the medieval tradition, he played the role of the knight. He had to praise her beauty and bring presents

Robert Jones ^{was} born in
 England. His family is of French
 origin — like the name of that name —
 but settled in Ireland ^{since} 1575 —
 He fought in a Welsh Regiment in
 France in 1914 — 1918. His father
 was Irish, his ^{grand} mother Scottish.
 His mother was German, but
 her mother ^{came} ~~was~~ ^{from} ~~of~~ a
 Norwegian family settled in Denmark.
 He has lived in Spain ^{since} 1924
 and ~~is~~ ^{is} an adoption ^{one} of his
 Spanish village. He ^{can also} ~~has~~ descent
 from the Prophet Mohammed ^{by way}
^{King Alfonso II King Charles} who
^{of King Edward I, not the last}
^{was the daughter of the last}
 Moorish King of ~~Spain~~ ^{Castile}; so, by the way,
 the Queen of England also ~~was~~
 can.

from his travels. He went into a long description of his muse, which in subsequent letters he elaborated on:

19 December 1968:

I went to Norway – which I loved – to see my goddaughter Julie who is in the Royal Norwegian Ballet and with whom I have – as I think I told you – a curiously magical relationship which we accept but cannot explain. Fortunately, she first became aware of it so I can't be accused of anything like cradle snatching. Besides, she remains a virgin, which is unusual these days. You'd love her, because she's the quiet sort – like you; though highly uneducated like all dancers.

His letter raised many questions in my mind. Was it possible that at his age love had a different meaning? Could he establish a “magical relationship” with the muse and yet be able to abstract it from the physical urges he had experienced for other women? Comparing me to his muse, on the other hand, was a compliment.

Another incident also raised my curiosity. While talking about his muse, he was suddenly distracted by the figure of a very handsome younger man who was sitting next to us. He was an Italo-Mexican poet, Claudio, with the perfect features of a Greek god. Claudio had inscribed a book of poems to me and handed me a copy on the bus. The young man's physique attracted Robert and he started a conversation. Several of his letters to me after he left Mexico referred to Claudio, often asking me about his whereabouts. I wondered if meeting Claudio brought back memories of a tormented attraction, he had felt for a younger classmate in his school days. The idea of a possible homosexual experience had haunted him ever since and as he explains in his autobiography, *Good-Bye to all That*, the occurrence had profoundly marked him. Another interpretation might be that Claudio reminded him, perhaps at the subconscious level, of Claudius, the Roman Emperor and hero of his novel *I, Claudius*.

While in his Olympic poem Octavio Paz condemned the Tlatelolco massacre, I believe Robert would have gone further, but as a foreign

visitor to Mexico, he refrained from taking a public stance. Privately he told me that the protests could perhaps have been placated through more dialogue with the students. While Paz denounced the government's indifference, Robert would have asked for more sympathy.

A few weeks later, back in the United Kingdom, he received from the Queen a gold medal for his poetry. On December 19 1968, he wrote to me about his audience with Her Majesty, during which she asked him how he came to write his poetry, and he told me, 'I use the same magic she uses: one reflects back the love one gives'.

My Ally

We returned from Cuernavaca in time for a splendid dinner organized by Ramón Xirau, who introduced us to several of his friends. We heard that there had been new troubles in town, although nobody knew the details. There had been fatalities during a large demonstration in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, opposite the Foreign Ministry. At the time we had no idea of the magnitude of what had occurred.

Robert remained quiet in deference to the Mexicans present, but he understood that the situation was perhaps more complicated than it appeared in the light banter of a dinner conversation. He listened to what others were saying. At the end of the evening, I accompanied him to his hotel, somewhat worried that the conversation might have discouraged him from staying on in the country, but he kept his word.

We continued our grand tour of poets in scattered sites around Mexico City. In the days that followed, we had a recital at Oaxtepec, a recreational park an hour away from the city and a second one at the Palace of Fine Arts in the historical centre of the city. There was a reading by the Colombian poet, Octavio Amórtegui, at the Club de Periodistas with Bonifaz Nuño and Andrés Henestrosa. Then a lecture on poetry and lyrics (*los poetas y el mar*) at the Galería de la Ciudad de México in the Alameda Central on the topic of nature, the

environment, and its relevance to poetry. In the evening a cocktail at the Anglo-American Cultural Institute allowed us to meet the Welsh poet, Bobi Jones, who appeared for a moment before being taken ill to the hospital.

There were poets all over town. They appeared in the press, were interviewed and showed up at social gatherings where they discussed issues of the day. There was a fair amount of press criticism because none of the public conversations were about the liberal ideas the activist poets espoused in their verses. We had a feast of words and poetry in the city, but it was disconnected from the political turmoil Mexico was going through.

Robert was pessimistic about the future. He worried about tensions in the world, about United States politics and about the political unrest surrounding the Olympics. He had a gloomy hunch that things would not get better. The oppression he had witnessed in Mexico scared him, and in his speculations came near to predicting the dystopia that would characterize the world we have now. He returned to these worrisome topics over and over in his letters.

One day he saw that I was carrying a copy of his autobiography *Good-Bye to All That* and asked me if he could inscribe it. Next to my name on the Ex Libris, he wrote 'Vivian Holzer + Robert Graves'. The inscription made me smile. He had become my true *socio*.

Opening of the Games of the XIX Olympiad

The date for the opening of the XIX Olympiad finally arrived, October 12th. As if by magic everything was ready and in place. It was a beautiful sunny day, the sky was clear, and the Olympic Stadium glittered in all its glory. The crowds approached the venue in perfect order, following the signs that led to the entrance and to the assigned places. There was electricity in the air. Expectations were at their highest. The white flag with the Olympic logo stood like a sentinel at the centre of the stadium next to a podium where three figures were to address the public: President Díaz Ordaz, Avery Brundage

and the President of the Mexican Olympic Committee, Pedro Ramirez Vázquez.

Robert and I were given VIP seats in the immediate vicinity of the stairway leading to the Olympic flame. After the welcoming speeches, the slim figure of Enriqueta Basilio, clad in a white short and T-shirt with a white band around her head ran into the stadium, the Olympic torch held tight in her extended fist. Watching her, I could appreciate Robert's comparison of the swift-footed Atalanta in his poem, which he would read the following day at the Olympic Village, with Enriqueta Basilio as the main invited guest.

Robert and I had long conversations, both during the Games and afterward in our correspondence, about what the Olympic Games represented for the ancient Greeks and how things had changed in modern times.⁷

An Olympic Poet Laureate

The Olympic Games came to an end on October 27th. Together, Robert and I recalled the best moments, the colour, the camaraderie among people from so many countries, and the many experiences we shared. We tried to put aside the event at Tlatelolco and the student unrest, though their shadow hung over us and remained in our memories for years.

To bring Robert's stay in Mexico to a happy close, I decided to organize an informal lunch at my parents' home with some of the Mexicans involved in the cultural part of the Games and several family friends: Oscar and Elena Urrutia, Ramón and Ana María Xirau and a few members of the intellectual community.

Even though the Poetry Symposium, as originally conceived by the Organizing Committee had been overshadowed and then scrapped by political events, Graves kept a positive attitude throughout, often coming up with ideas on how to turn his presence into a success for Mexico. He thus became our Olympic 'Poet Laureate' for having participated with such enthusiasm in what otherwise might have been a disaster. My father suggested giving Robert an Omega watch

as a souvenir to remind him of his visit. Robert was thrilled with his gift. He referred to it in many of his letters, recalling the intensity of the moment and saying the watch would remind him of us whenever he looked at the time. For example, on November 15, 1968, he wrote: ‘Congratulate your father from me on his TIMING – the biggest triumph of the games technically at least [...] I am an Omega man now’.

He thanked me for making his stay in Mexico exciting (although I hesitate to take sole credit – or blame – for the excitement). He wished there could be a follow-up visit. He also discovered that he ‘loved’ me. Many letters repeat that he ‘loves me still’. I suppose this was a figure of speech, but he was very insistent on it and in one of his letters clarifies that *amor vincit omnia* can also mean ‘love binds’. He made me part of his world and probably idealized a relationship that had become personal because of the intense turn of events.

He wanted to keep an ongoing dialogue with his Mexican friends. Maybe this explains why he developed the habit of writing short letters in which he kept me abreast of his daily activities, accomplishments, trips and ailments, as well as his relationship with Juli.

The Materialist

Shortly after his return to Spain, Robert let me know that he was sent a ‘splendid’ letter from Pedro Ramirez Vázquez presenting him with a medal from the Olympic Cultural Committee in appreciation of his participation. He was happy to receive the medal, but he made fun of it because it was not real gold. He was happier when he received a letter from the Queen of England awarding him a real gold medal for his contribution to poetry in the English language. He wrote several times about medals and one saying he would have it appraised. 21 October 1968:

My Mexican gold medal has been goggled at by all the natives except a knowing fisherman who said: ‘those are on sale at the banks – how much did you pay in Mexico? – they are very expensive here’.

Have been offered the Queen’s Medal for my book of poems. Don’t know if I should accept. It’s given mostly to young poets with friends at Court. But I am loyal to the Crown.

Robert tended to repeat himself in his letters. This was undoubtedly due mainly to ageing, however, I believe that it was also his way of insisting on facts that mattered and keeping memories alive. The scribbled scraps of paper he used to hand me during the Olympics anticipated the form of his letters. He thus went from one topic to the next in order. He often worried he had already discussed a subject. I would find jotted on the margin of the page: ‘didn’t I tell you this already in my last letter?’

London: The Art of Being Peripatetic

I wrote to him in the summer of 1970 when I was planning a trip to London and asked if he would be around. I received an immediate answer: ‘So glad you have surfaced again! Yes, I’ll be there!’

He invited me to his temporary home in the city so that I could meet his family. I was introduced to his wife, Beryl, and to a few other relatives. He then suggested we take a walk along the Thames to catch up. It was his turn to be the guide!

I had already discovered his disposition for walking during his stay in Mexico. His thoughts came faster when he was on the move. I followed his brisk steps as I had done before, while he recalled episodes during the Olympics and heard about my new endeavours. He wanted most to tell me about the discoveries he had been making in the world of mythology with reference to plants and mushrooms.

He spoke at length about the double birth of Dionysius. Robert was immersed in the study of the role of mushrooms and plants in Greek

mythology. Dionysius was a mushroom commonly used in pagan rituals and was known for its psychedelic properties with its use restricted to select sacred ceremonies. Dionysius appeared in the fall at the foot of ash trees at the height of the rainy season. Robert deduced that the mushroom's birth was associated with lightning, common in autumn storms. The ash tree attracts lightning and many pagan ceremonies, known as *mysterries*, took place in Athens in the fall. In the spring, there were other festivals corresponding to the flowering season. The pollen from the flowers of springtime could produce similar effects. Graves was excited to explain his discoveries in detail.

Robert's fascination with plants sprang from his belief that the role of the scholar was to study the myths at the heart of every religion. Each myth had a hidden symbolism, and each symbol had some connection to the flora used in the production of potions, e.g. ambrosia, taken during pagan religious ceremonies. The careful study of plants would unveil the ingredients that were combined in these concoctions. Only a few individuals could acquire a deep knowledge of those ingredients. Mushrooms and potions were reserved for them and among the Greeks only the priests could ingest magical brews because of their unique connection to the gods. Mere mortals were prohibited from trying any of these mixtures. By combining the Greek initial letters of ingredients for ambrosia he concluded that they spelled the words for mushroom.

Robert insisted that all religions were based on similar rites, except for Judaism and Christianity. He told me that he had written an article on the role of mushrooms in religion for an article in *The Atlantic* in 1957.⁸

Robert wanted to experiment with mushrooms himself and felt authorized to do so as a poet. He had already revealed his desire in Mexico when we first met because he had heard of a mushroom in Oaxaca that had the same properties as Dionysius. He was convinced both species could get him to the gates of paradise, and he wanted to pass through during his lifetime, especially since his health was deteriorating and entering that unknown dimension was vital for him.

We were back at square one. I had distracted Robert in Mexico with worldlier matters. But since then, he had been tormented by strange visions of faraway places. My presence and our long walk in London allowed him to talk about this. He felt free and relieved to articulate his concerns. We kept a quick pace. He was happy to share his bizarre awakenings and required no reaction from me. He was totally absorbed in his train of thought and became quite agitated with his disclosures. He lived within a world of his own that was seldom fully revealed to others.

We came to a halt at Battersea Park where he wanted to show me a bronze sculpture of himself as a fusilier in World War I. At that point he changed topics and started to talk about more personal issues. He turned the conversation to his current muse, Julie, the ballet dancer with the Danish Royal Ballet.

He explained that it was Julie who had discovered the magical relationship that bound them together. He was convinced that in questions of the heart, it was always the woman who had to reveal her feelings first because she was bequeathed with a hidden role. She was the White Goddess's messenger who was put in the poet's path as an incarnation of love. The poet had to cherish her. His verses would come as a natural response to her love.

Julie filled Robert's imagination. She provided the bridge between myth and reality. He was convinced that he played the role of a soldier whose duty was to wholeheartedly serve the muse while the magic persisted.

He had encountered other muses before, but with the passage of time had eventually felt betrayed by them. He despised their unfaithfulness and their lack of total commitment. Even with Laura Riding, the woman who had had the most influence in his young life, love had come to an end. Deep disappointment and suffering had followed, and he was forced to set her aside. He remained loyal to his former muses, showing them generosity, but they were no longer his source of inspiration. They had fulfilled their role; their virtues were lost, and the poet had to carry on.

Past muses had caused him emotional damage and huge distress. He had overcome the pain as part of what he believed were trials

posed by The White Goddess. However, having experienced sorrow, he now sought happier times. He was old and intuited the presence of a younger figure as a symbol of purity and virginity. Juli provided the perfect configuration to his fixation.

Two years later, I visited Robert in Deyá, with my parents, and Robert insisted we all come for dinner to his house on top of the cliffs. He lived in rustic surroundings: a stone structure adjoining a huge orchard. He grew crab apples and proudly told us that he picked and cooked them himself, turning them into a delicious jam in his spare time. He led us to the well in the garden and sprinkled our heads with its fresh water, making us partake of the magic of the spot. The view down to the sea was breath-taking: sharp rocks, a small bay at the bottom and the deep blue sea. There was nothing to obstruct the beauty of that fabulous place.



From left to right, author's mother, Robert Graves, author.

Beryl called us to join her for supper, greeting us with a spread of homemade food: cheese, bread and glasses of wine. This was their daily domestic ritual. After dinner, Robert asked me to take a walk with him to the village. We left Beryl and my parents behind and took an earth-beaten path that provided a short-cut leading to town. On the way, he stopped at the door of a beautiful, whitewashed house, took a key out of his pocket, opened the door with a smile

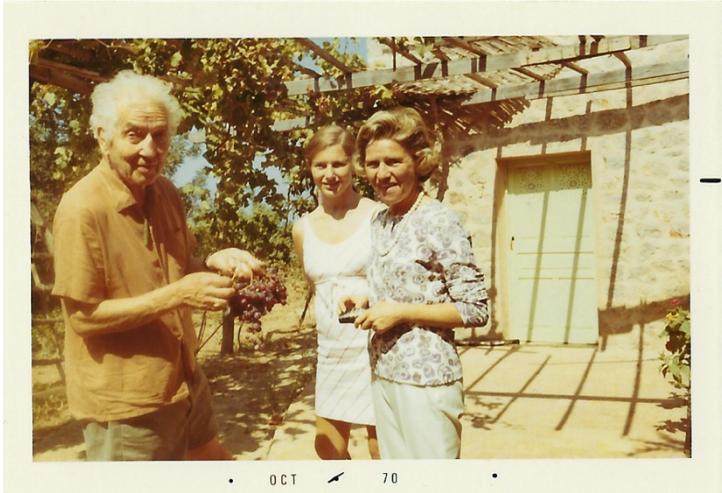
and explained that we were entering his muse's house, Julie's abode when she was in Deyá.



Omega Man!

In contrast to the plain stone structure where we had our dinner, Robert was excited to show off a corner with treasures he brought back from his travels abroad as presents for his muse. This was *his* castle, and he was the knight showering gifts on his dame. He told

me Julie had this secret place a short distance from his home, where she could stay when she came to Deyá.



From left to right, Robert Graves, author, author's mother.

He proceeded to explain the origin of the objects, many of which had already been mentioned in his letters: special coins, amulets, boxes and stones. He dwelt on their provenance and symbolism, enthralled with his descriptions, and picking up the items with care so that I could closely observe them. I appreciated his enthusiasm. Each article acquired a new meaning through his interpretations.

April 9th, 1969

have [sic] just been given an oval stone found under the Roman site of *Seguntium* (later *Sinadon*, hence 'Snowdon', now Carnarvon) dated 200 A.D. and inscribed in Arabic characters with a prophesy that it will be worn by a poet who will discover the secret of the Welsh Hills!! So it was sent out to me (I'm having it mounted in a gold ring) Isn't life wonderful?

In addition to the ring there also was the Mexican Olympic medal, the Queen's medal and sundry other paraphernalia. The accumulation

of objects gave a concrete presence to what until now had been merely anecdotal details. He was a historian who kept chronological records of his possessions. Everything was meticulously organized and carefully placed. He supported his stories with memorabilia. The traveling cavalier was proud to prove that his adventures were not a product of his imagination. He sought truth in his writing and these material objects were for him unrelenting evidence that his stories were based on reality. I was captivated by Robert's complex explanations and he was delighted with my interest. I admired his knowledge and command of names and places. He mixed personal and philosophical questions in his discourse. I had really become a friend.

My Other Agenda

Robert and I continued meeting from time to time until the end of his life. Once, after one of his poetry readings at The Mermaid Theatre in London, I introduced him to my then American banker boyfriend. Although he didn't disapprove, he wasn't enthusiastic because he didn't like bankers. A few months later I sent him a long letter explaining that I had met a young and handsome diplomat in Mexico City, with whom I had a brief three-month relationship, after which we married. His response was immediate and very spontaneous:

May 14, 1971

That sounds all right – more natural and a good mixture of races and no damned technology in the air. Congratulations. Really, I'm delighted [...] Well, that's a relief! As my mother would have said: 'Yes, my dear, a very suitable marriage'. [...] Hand clasp and *abrazos* to A. I diagnose music and a good hand at poker.

In 1974, when we were living in London and Andrés was at the Mexican Embassy, Robert came to our house for tea with a tiny dress as a present for our first daughter, born a week earlier.

I saw him several times after that. He complained about losing his memory and forgetting many of his friends. He could no longer remember his mythological heroes by name and that distressed him, but he never forgot his closest friends.

Here is the Spanish poem and English translation Robert read at the Olympic Games. As he explained it, he was singing an ode to a woman, and this woman was the human representation of the female sex who, like The White Goddess, was about to give the spark of life to the Olympics.

Antorcha y Corona, 1968

Píndaro no soy, sino caballero
De San Patricio; y nuestro santo
Siglos atrás se hizo mejicano.

Todos aquí alaban las mujeres
Y con razón, como divinos seres –
Por eso entrará en mis deberes

A vuestra Olimpiada mejicana
El origen explicar de la corona:
En su principio fue femenina....

Antes que Hércules con paso largo
Metros midiera para el estadio
Miles de esfuerzos así alentado –

Ya antes, digo, allí existía
Otra carrera mas apasionada
La cual presidia la Diosa Hera.

La virgen que, a su fraternidad
Supero con máxima velocidad
Ganaba el premio de la santidad:

La corona de olivo.... Me perdonará
 El respetable, si de Atalanta
 Sueño, la corredora engañada

Con tres manzanas, pero de oro fino....
 Y si los mitos griegos hoy resumo
 Es que parecen de acuerdo pleno,

A la inventora primeval del juego,
 A la Santa Madre, más honores dando
 Que no a su portero deportivo

En trescientas trece Olimpiadas
 Este nego la entrada a las damas
 Amenazándolas, ai, con espadas!

Aquí, por fin, brindemos por la linda
 Enriqueta de Basilio: la primera
 Que nos honra con antorcha y corona.⁹

Torch and Crown, 1968

No Pindar, I, but a poor gentleman
 Of Irish race. Patrick, our learned saint,
 Centuries past made himself Mexican.

All true-bred Mexicans idolize women
 And with sound reason, as divine beings,
 I therefore owe it you as my clear duty

At your Olympics, here in Mexico,
 To explain the origin of the olive crown:
In the Golden Age women alone could wear it.

Long before Hercules with his huge stride
 Paced out the circuit of a stadium,
 Provoking men to incalculable efforts,

Long, long before, in Argos, had been run
 Even more passionately, a girls' foot race
 Under the watchful eye of Mother Hera.
 The inspired runner who outstripped all rivals
 Of her sorority and finished first
 Bore off that coveted and holy prize –

The olive crown. Ladies and gentlemen,
 Forgive me if I brood on Atalanta,
 A champion quarter-miler tricked one day

By three gold apples tumbled on her track;
 And if I plague you with these ancient myths
 That is because none of them disagrees

In paying higher honours to the foundress
 Of all competitive sport – the Holy Mother–
 Than to her sportive janitor, Hercules.

Three hundred and thirteen Olympic Games
 Hercules held, though warning off all ladies,
 Even as audience, with the naked sword!

So homage to Enriqueta de Basilio
 Of Mexico, the first girl who has ever
 Honoured these Games with torch and olive crown!
 (pp. 36-7)

Heartfelt thanks to William Graves and the Robert Graves Trust
 for their kind permission to reprint the poems, letters and manuscript
 of corrected biographical introduction.

Vivian Holzer Rozental came to Mexico at the age of two and has lived there ever since. She earned university degrees at Bryn Mawr College and Columbia University. After her studies in the US, Vivian worked in the cultural department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and as an editor for various publications. She is married to a career Mexican Ambassador and has lived in the UK, Switzerland and Sweden. They have two daughters and four grandchildren.

NOTES

¹ Abridged for *The Robert Graves Review*.

² Robert Graves (England), Robert Lowell (US), René Char (France), Octavio Paz (Mexico), Leon Felipe (Spain), Pablo Neruda (Chile), Guiseppe Ungaretti (Italy), Yevgeny Yevtushenko (USSR) and Leopold Senghor (Senegal), Odysseus Elytis (Greece), Stephen Spender (England), Nicolás Guillen (Cuba) and Bobi Jones (Wales).

³ Robert Graves, *Colophon to Love Respelt* (London: Rota, 1967), p. 2.

⁴ This would have been the new Omega Photosprint photofinish camera OPS 1; 1963.

⁵ Graves to author, undated [between end of 1968 and beginning 1969]

⁶ The number of deaths resulting from the event is disputed. Kate Doyle documented the deaths of forty-four people, however other estimates range from 300 to 400, with eyewitnesses reporting hundreds dead. See ‘Tlatelolco massacre’ *Wikipedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tlatelolco_massacre> [accessed 4 July 2022]

⁷ Graves to the author, 15 November 1968:

It was a Great Games; and as I prophesy the last probably for a few decades. Munich will be a shambles, even if there is a Games there. The Germans have no *cariño*, no *fuego*, no *duende* no ... etc.

The reality would prove to be even more terrible than he predicted.

⁸ Robert Graves, ‘Mushrooms, Food of the Gods’, *Atlantic*, 200 (August 1957), 73-77.

⁹ Robert Graves, *Beyond Giving* (London: Rota, 1969), pp. 34-5.

To Return to *Wild Olives*: Interview with William Graves

Robert Graves Oral History Project

Abstract: Robert Graves Oral History Project Session #1 and #2 interview with William Graves, 9, 11, February 2021. The following is not a transcript of the interview, but a long excerpt that has been revised and edited for publication in *The Robert Graves Review*.

Keywords: Robert Graves, Deyá, Mallorca, *Wild Olives*, fatherhood

Carl: William, this oral history concerns your father Robert Graves, but, as his son, your life experiences and opinions are very valuable and if you have anything personal you'd like to interject, please feel free to do so, it would be most welcome. But let's get right to it. How did you address Robert: was he 'father' or 'dad'?

William: Always 'father'.

Carl: Can you elaborate a little bit on your first remembrances about the family, moving from England to Deyá? Is any of that in your memory, or is it not present?

William: The trouble with that is I wrote about it, and I now don't know how much of it is my own childhood memory, or what I actually know happened. I do have memories of arriving in Deyá. I was five and a half. That's quite a few years ago, in May 1946. We left from Croydon airport, of which little exists anymore, in London, and flew to France. We stopped in Rennes where there were some people from Mallorca Robert knew from before the war. They put us up and gave us our first good meal, (Father said) since the start of the War. Again, I don't remember this. We overnighted in Rennes and then flew on down to Toulouse, where we stopped to refuel and to get

permission to fly into Spain. We had no problem at all getting permission to fly into Spain, but we had a lot of trouble finding fuel for the aircraft. It was the next day, I think, that we flew from Toulouse to Barcelona and got permission pretty quickly to come across to Mallorca. In all it was a three-day journey. There was just Robert, Beryl, myself, Lucia, and Juan; five of us Graveses and some luggage in the in the airplane, plus the two pilots.

The interesting thing about that flight, which was not recorded until recently, is that the pilot was specially picked. Robert had a friend called 'Crab' Searl¹ who was in the RAF in North Africa, and, when the war ended, he became a director of a company called Hunting Airways,² using war surplus Dragon Rapide aircraft as air taxis.

When Robert wanted to come back to Mallorca, Crab told him, 'You can't just drive down to Mallorca or take a bus or take the train. There's nothing like that in France, in 1946, so I suggest we fly you down'. Crab added, 'I've got just the pilot for you'. This part I knew. However, I found out afterwards that, in fact, the chief pilot, Captain Bebb (possibly ex-MI5), was the same pilot who had flown Franco from the Canary Islands (where he was exiled) to Tetuan (in North Africa) in 1936. Which is where the Spanish Civil War started.³

William: So, we had absolutely no problem getting into Spain. [laughter]. I really have very few early memories.

Carl: Do you have any memory at all of how Robert felt about the move back to Spain? Was it a happy moment for him?

William: I'm sure it was. No, I have no memory of that sort of thing. I do vaguely remember during the war, we were in Galmpton, and I guess it must have been '44, just before D-Day, because Father used to take me for walk and ... somehow this is mixed up in my memory with *Wife to Mr. Milton*, I don't know why, I don't know whether Father was talking about it to me, or something. But we walked through this massive number of tents, with soldiers everywhere. I found out later that these were American soldiers getting ready for

D-Day, because we were very close to Dartmouth, and the River Dart. And of course, that's where D-Day all started.

Carl: In your *Wild Olives*, introducing your life with Elena,⁴ you mentioned that you never told your parents what you did during the day: 'I went to Palma' was as long a statement as you made. What age were you about that time?

William: I was twenty-four. There's one letter from Robert that says, 'William left without even saying goodbye'. And that's when I went off to the States! It wasn't a very intimate relationship between my parents, there wasn't any kissing and hugging and things like that. I don't know why, but that's just the way it was.

Carl: Were dinner conversations along the same lines when you were growing up? Did Robert dominate conversation, was he silent or....

William: Robert tended to talk about whatever he was working on. At table with the family, he might start off on a theme of the Virgin Mary and his historical interpretation when he was working on *The Nazarene Gospel Restored*, or ideas in *The White Goddess*, things like that. Eventually Beryl would say, 'Robert, shut up', or 'Leave it alone', or simply 'Come on, Robert'. But he needed to talk to someone. Beryl was the only adult there, usually, and we listened in.⁵

Carl: You write that Robert was emotionally inaccessible. Do you recall specific incidents that tended to reinforce that feeling or that thought?

William: Well, when we got Mallorca, he was already fifty years old. So, there was a tremendous age gap; it was even more like having a grandfather than a father. So, we never sort of cuddled or anything. He used to bathe us at night. He continued doing a lot of the housework and he did the washing up. He liked washing up

and he bathed us in the bathroom in the evening and so dried us off with a towel, or things like that, and told us stories, and sang us songs. And that was nice; but you know when he was in work mode, he was just in work mode – and that was it. You didn't go anywhere near him, and you didn't make any noise.

Carl: That was forbidden territory, while he was working?

William: Absolutely. I think I tell this in *Wild Olives*. We had a wind-up gramophone that had been Laura's gramophone before the war, and it was just one of the wind-up ones, obviously, with 78 rpm discs, with a steel needle.⁶ And when we wanted to listen to the music, we would put in a rose thorn in place of the needle, so it muted it down. We had to put our ear very close to it, so there was no way Robert could hear.

Carl: Well, that's one of the things – I'm sort of diverging from my script a bit, but the idea of Robert Graves ... I think he treated writing as sort of a job; he did work virtually every day. He treated it as a very serious thing and not something that he took up and put down, and you know it was a matter of long periods of concentration, I'm thinking.

William: Absolutely. You know he started working at 8:30 or 9:00 and worked through to lunch time. When he was in a study, you just didn't go anywhere near that. And when mother sent me or whomever to call him, the door of his study had a particular squeak; and it was really rather frightening opening it and saying, 'Father, you know lunch is ready'. This is what makes me quite a good literary executor because I'm very third party about it. [laughter]

Carl: You say, when you were in the *Clinica Adriano*, there was only one time when you could count on your father's undivided attention.⁷ Were you always aware that he was composing poems or thinking about poetic problems?

William: Well, it was undivided to a certain extent because that's where he started writing *Seven Days in New Crete*. So, he started writing that in the hospital because he didn't have any papers or research material with him so that was a novel he could write. Even then ... I guess I was given something to draw or something.

Carl: In terms of your parents' relationship: was he the Master of the House type, or was Beryl running the household, basically?

William: She was running the household in terms of making sure that the food came in and all the rest of it, but she would send him down to buy whatever was needed – to the village shop. He didn't mind: he could think things through. We had a couple of girls working for us. But no, when he was working, Beryl was just organizing the housework and looking after us children. And then when he was working, and the three of us children were at the village school, that's when she started learning Spanish and translating. On her own in Spain and not speaking the language, she learned Spanish reading *Don Quixote* with a dictionary. Well, it was about four years later, I suppose, when she started translating. But she'd type things out for Robert even when his secretary Karl came back.⁸ So, there was always work going on in the house.

Carl: Your father had rituals and superstitions, for example, bowing to the new moon seven times. Were there any others that stand out in your memory?

William: No, he bowed to the moon three times, and he turned a silver coin three times. He did that when he was bowing or just afterwards. Those were the two things he had to do every new moon; and it was a bit of a fretful.... There were superstitions: if the new moon was ever seen through glass that was supposed to bring bad luck. Like breaking a mirror. And if we had to come to the house because we had forgotten something, we had to sit on a chair and count to ten, or three, I don't remember. It's one of those things one did.

Carl: I remember one evening when I was at Deyá, Beryl stood up and said she was going to go outside and say goodnight to Mercury or Venus and Mars. Was that something she picked up from Robert?

William: She must have. I never heard that one. Maybe it was just an excuse to get out. [laughter]

Carl: You recount a drought in Deyá and Bill Waldren performing an American Indian rain dance while your father stood astride an irrigation ditch and tinkled his West African rain bell.⁹ Were there other times, Robert or Bill and other people performed makeshift rituals?

William: Well, that was a year when there really was a bad drought, and Robert had this bell from his niece, Sally Chilver, who was his half-brother Philip Graves's daughter. She was an anthropologist and worked with Phyllis Kaberry in Cameroon; and she brought him back objects like that: there was ... a Queen's stool, which is still in the house; and the rain bell was another one of those things that came.¹⁰

Yes, and the way it worked: The drought was serious. So, this priest took some saint out (and I don't know what saint it was) around the church, and Bill Waldren did his Indian dance (I don't know what tribe he was from [laughter]), and Robert stood over ... straddled the little irrigation ditch with his West African bell.

And it pelted with rain that night. It absolutely [poured]. I don't know whether it was the saint, if it was the West Indian dance or if it was the West African bell.

Carl: Well, sometimes it just takes a nudge, doesn't it?

William: Yes.

Carl: You describe Robert telling you stories and making up rhymes when you were in the hospital. You emphasize a story about Deyá

in Roman times, how young village boys were given a sling when they were your age and had to hit a target before they were allowed to have their breakfast.

William: Oh, this is the Balearic slingers we're talking about. It is said that in the old days the locals used to hang something up on a tree; and the children would have to knock it off with a slingshot before they could have their breakfast. But of course, the Balearic slingers were very important. There were actually slingers throughout the Mediterranean, but the Balearic Slingers were the most famous. My brother Juan used to do slingshots and won a championship once.

Carl: Let me step back a bit to your stepbrother David who died when you were quite young. Do you recall, if Robert ever made an effort to let you know what had happened, or was it not a topic of conversation?¹¹

William: It certainly wasn't something that I was aware of. I have a photograph with him, and I must be about two and a half years old; that was just before he left for Burma, that was in early 1943. I'm there with David's officer's cap on. Robert's behind me holding me, and my brother-in-law Cliff Dalton is in the picture as well. So, but no, I don't remember anything. At least I wasn't sensitive enough to realize anything's going on. There are letters, you know. Obviously, Robert was very concerned about the whole thing.

Carl: Did your father follow politics, English or Spanish carefully? I know he said that he had no religion, and no politics, but I wondered if that was entirely accurate.

William: He was perfectly aware of what was going on, both in England and in Spain. But ... not really. I think about when he was made – I've just seen these letters recently – when he was made Professor of Poetry at Oxford, he actually tried to get leverage with the future Nobel Laureate for Literature, Cela,¹² to help him to see if he could protect Deyá from the tourist hordes.

So, in terms of local politics he was active; and when you read his Pre-War diaries, he was a lot more interested [in politics] because Laura Riding was obviously more interested. But basically, he always said he was in Deyá, he was a guest there, and he was not interested in politics, and that was it.¹³

Carl: I suppose he had to be very careful about village politics as well.

William: Well, village politics were a lot easier. The village policy was simply whether someone stole your water or took your girlfriend [laughter] or used your path, or whatever; you know that's what I thought village politics was all about.

Carl: Robert writes often about money. You mentioned in *Wild Olives* that he wrote *I, Claudius* to settle the mortgage on Canellun, and that he got involved in deals to adapt his works into film. Do you remember money being an ongoing worry or topic of conversation?

William: The first time I got it – felt actually personal about it, let's put it that way – was in 1956 (I was already in school in England) and he was planning to send Lucia and Juan to Switzerland, or somewhere, to school (they went to Switzerland eventually), and he thought well, maybe he'd better sell the Posada, his guest house, and I pleaded with him not to; and so he didn't. And shortly after that is when he started doing his American lecture trips, which paid well. January '57, I think, was the first foray into America; he did it every year after that until the mid-nineteen-sixties.

Carl: Do you recall your parents' marriage? When they got married? Was there a ceremony?

William: No, we children weren't told. It was too dangerous to tell us they weren't married. Franco's regime was National Catholicism so they couldn't gamble we wouldn't inadvertently let it slip. Because

you know it's bad enough being thought a Protestant; if, on top of that you're a bastard ... [laughter]

Carl: It's a double whammy.

William: That was a double whammy.

William: Beryl – I have the papers – Beryl actually changed her name by deed poll in 1943. She changed it from Hodge to Graves. So, her passport was made out to 'Beryl Graves' when we came to Spain, actually. I don't know who suggested that to them. But he always had some very good friends who, you know, knew the way to do these things without ...

Carl: Finesse!

William: Yes!

Carl: You begin *Wild Olives* with a long description of butterflies and fruit. Did your father teach you or influence you to take an interest in the natural world, or did he ever express an interest himself?

William: I think, that was, that was ... written with hindsight. Obviously, I knew the local plants pretty well, but not, not that ... he taught me. I think that's something that I added to the story. It's difficult to recall what you have added and what you haven't added to a book. [laughter]

Carl: You also mentioned in *Wild Olives* that your father had certain therapies whenever he got stuck with his writing, including bottling fruit, making jam, jellies, chutney, together with gardening and washing up; are there other therapies or rituals perhaps that you can remember that aided him in his work?

William: Mostly it was his strong routine. He got up early, 7:30 or 8 o'clock. He sorted Beryl's breakfast, took it up to her room. Then made his breakfast, or vice versa; I don't know which one was which – can't remember. Ate his breakfast of bread and oil and whatever. And then went into a study and that was the last he was seen until lunchtime. Karl came over around nine o'clock or a quarter to nine with whatever he'd been typing (the clean copy) the day before, and they discussed that.

They discussed everything, anything Karl didn't understand or thought that might be changed or whatever. And then Robert loaded him with another sheaf of manuscripts and away he went. Then Robert just settled down and worked through till lunch.

Okay, so he'd get up every once in a while, and go to check his brazier to make sure that it was still heating or needed tending, that sort of thing, just to move a little. But of course, one of the things ... he refused to use any kind of ballpoint pens or – of course, that was later – or earlier, any fountain pens because he said that using pen and ink made you dip the nib in the ink and actually removed the strain from his arm. So that was a bit of exercise; and then it gave him 'thought time' when he was dipping the ink, he would re-read the last sentence or whatever.

Carl: That's fascinating.

William: That was a thing. But if he wanted to think things through, he went outside to chop wood, dig the garden, or tend his compost, where he knew no one would disturb him.

Carl: Do you have recollections of your grandparents?

William: Not my grandfather on Robert's side, none of A. P. Graves. He died in '32 or '34, something like that. The only time I met my grandmother, who was rather a sort of a black figure, a black hat and black coat, she took us to the zoo. I must have been eight, in 1948, after the war when we came over from Deyá for the first time. And we went to the zoo in London around Primrose Hill. I don't remember

her at all, really. I just have this rather sinister caricature of her; she must have been 90 by that time.

Carl: During your early years, you spent summers in London up until 1952. You talk about how happy you were later just to remain in Mallorca. Did you have any sense, when you were in London, that Robert felt a similar constraint that London life for him was also somewhat uncomfortable or unnatural?

William: No, I don't think so; I think he enjoyed being in London, just to get to see his friends, to see everyone, get a bit of his British culture back. Of course, he was completely away from it. And you know, he did BBC recordings, and he took me once to visit T. S. Eliot when he was publishing *The White Goddess* ... it must have been very early, in '48 or '49. I think I've mentioned this in *Wild Olives*. T. S. Eliot had a little set of kind of transfers you put in water, and you bet on horses. And the horses raced: curiously, I won. It says a lot for T. S. Eliot, I must say. [laughter]

Carl: What were you doing in the summers in London?

William: Well, we had my grandparents, so we went to tea quite often in their house in Hampstead where mother had grown up. They had an enormous lawn there, we used to play around there, and my grandfather had a wonderful car, I don't know what make it was, called the Green Gauge. Beautiful dark green car, you know, open with bucket seats in the back, where the boot would be normally. We went around London every once in a while, Madame Tussauds, the London Zoo, the Tower of London, and then went out of town to see friends of Robert and Beryl, the Eastwoods in Lowestoft (she was a college friend of Beryl), James Reeves's family. Basically, Robert sort of made the most of it, and visited all his old friends, publishers, and agents.

Carl: You tell a wonderful story of Robert's attempts to teach you Latin by making you translate *Fabulae Faciles*. Did you dread this exercise?

William: I don't remember dreading it. I probably wasn't very good, but I got my Ordinary level Latin when I was in school afterwards so that was okay. I didn't take the Advance level. What I learned has always been very useful.

Carl: Was Robert a good teacher?

William: I don't remember him being a good or bad teacher. It's just one of those things that haven't stuck in my memory, somehow. I don't remember him teaching me very much. I think he taught Tomás a lot more.¹⁴ He must have given me a little bit of Latin, but not much. I think I would have remembered it better if it had been a constant thing.

Carl: In *Wild Olives*, you remember Martin Seymour Smith as 'a small wiry and intense young man'. You say Robert found it useful to talk to Martin about whatever he was working on. Can you recall anything about their relationship? Would Martin have been a student of sorts to Robert, or a sounding board?

William: Martin started off as a fan of Robert's, I think, even in the forties, when he was a schoolboy. His father was Frank Seymour Smith, who provided Robert with all his books from W. H. Smiths. He ran the second-hand book section of W. H. Smith's, and whenever Robert needed a book, he would write to Frank, and the book would be sent out to Mallorca. And if it was a dangerous book or the Franco government shouldn't know about it, it came in the diplomatic bag. There was someone – I can't remember his name now, an expert on Mexico – in the consulate in Barcelona and he helped Robert in that sort of way.

But Martin came out as my tutor. My first tutor was W. S. Merwin, Bill Merwin. Bill was much more interested in his own work than

me, so that was no good. Robert actually fired him, which was good. [laughter] But then – I think because Martin had probably just finished college, he said, why don't you come up and tutor William to get his exams to get into a school in England. I suspect it was that; then of course, because Janet had just finished her classics degree at Oxford, he put her to work on *The Greek Myths*. So, Robert made use of people's talents.

Carl: It seems to me that there's this extraordinary thing in Robert's life, where he found the right person at the right time who had the right information.

William: And he would to a certain extent change his work to what the other person could help him with. He was interested in so many things and had such a wide knowledge that, if he found someone that could help him on a particular subject, he made the most of him.

Education was Beryl's greatest concern. The Deyá village school did not work out for us, although I enjoyed it. In 1951 when I was eleven, Lucia eight, and Juan seven, she and Robert decided to move to Palma for our schooling.

We had two flats in Palma, one on the second floor and one on the third floor: the family lived on the second-floor flat, and Martin lived on the third floor. But Robert kept the front room on the third floor for his study. That way he got away from the family flat which was too noisy with kids and all the rest of it; and then our friends used to come in. So that Martin and Jan were upstairs, with Robert in the front room. Jan was helping Robert with his *Greek Myths*, and Martin was teaching me in their dining room – I don't remember anything that Martin told me. I remember Janet teaching me Latin, and that was more successful, but nevertheless Martin managed to get me through my Common Entrance exams so I could get into an English school. So, you know, Robert in his funny way and Beryl in her funny way managed to get me an education. I'm not quite sure how they did it, but it worked.

Carl: Let me switch gears a bit. After Robert broke with Alistair Reid over Margot Callas,¹⁵ did he ever give you a sense he regretted it?

William: No, he wasn't the sort of person who would regret things like that, I don't think. He just found an alternative, and that turned out to be Idries Shah. I think he met Idries through the head of a Witches Coven.¹⁶ He kind of moved over to Idries Shah after Alastair. Of course, Shah was already around anyway. Martin, Alastair, Idries, all acted as sounding boards for Robert when he had new ideas. Alistair remained friends of the family apart from Robert, but Robert was very unforgiving.¹⁷

Carl: In a general, or a specific sense?

William: I think in a specific sense. He sort of built an almost religious relationship with Margot, Muse worship, and Alastair was his best friend. When Margot went off with Alastair, he took the religious parallel a step further. It gets tangled up with the White Goddess. He saw himself as twins with Alastair. Halfway through the year one gets murdered, the other one goes on to reign and then later the other one gets murdered and the first one comes back or – I'm not quite sure how it works, but something like that. That's the way Robert saw it. Alistair perhaps became his evil alter-ego.

Carl: You said your father could become quite irrational when he turned against someone; do you recall any other instances of this? Was it kind of an all-or-nothing arrangement?

William: Well, I can't think of anyone particular, but I remember when this – I suppose it's not really the same thing – but one of these American students who were in Deyá in the nineteen seventies, I guess Robert was already ... seventy-five, and he and this young American were sitting on the sofa in Canellun talking when Elena walked in and Robert said, 'don't you ever get up when a lady comes in?' And this young student looked blankly. 'Well in this house we do', and

Robert got him by the scruff of the neck and the seat of his pants, and literally threw him out of the room. [laughter]

You know so you've got to remember Robert was a pretty strong person. He'd been boxing, he survived the First World War, he survived the Spanish flu and he survived jumping out of a window after Laura.

Carl: You said, your father was 'wonderfully persuasive'. Do you remember a particular conversation or conversations that made you realize this?

William: Not particularly. I don't know what I was writing about when I said that. But yes, the thing was, he had such a vast amount of knowledge that he could persuade you of just about anything, because he knew everything; he just did. All his books are based on research, and they were all on different subjects. Other than about mechanical things, although he knew how to start up a car. The first car we had in Mallorca, when we got the flats, was one of the ones you had to crank – it didn't have a self-starter you needed to have a handle to start it up. He just started it up very quickly. Beryl would drive. He'd never drive. He drove once around the block in Cairo and swore he'd never ever drive again.

Carl: And that tended to be that one time, was it?

William: Yeah, that was the car that Sassoon gave Robert and Nancy to take to Cairo.¹⁸ He gave them, I guess it was a Ford, a little thing, and it was very useful when they were in Cairo. I guess, they must have sold it off when they were in Cairo. And they came out without it.

Carl: You describe bullfighting quite enthusiastically as a connoisseur, and you say Robert was very enthusiastic as well. Can you recall any conversations about bullfighting?

William: Maybe not conversations, but he certainly went to the bullfights before the war and saw some of the really great bullfighters. And he had enough knowledge about bullfighting, and of course he looked at it very much in terms of the sort of the mythological side of things, and then ... Crete and Knossos and bullfights in Greece, and the ladies jumping, the athletes jumping over their horns, I think. But you know he was very much into that sort of thing. And he was very quick on learning the rules about what was permitted and what wasn't; it wasn't just watching a bull being killed; it was the whole ballet of the thing, with rather a dangerous opponent.

Carl: You mentioned that Beryl translated *The Infant with a Globe* by Alarcon, and *The Cross and the Sword*, by Galvan. Robert polished them and published them under his name. Did Beryl contribute to writing in other ways? Are there other works that she deserves credit for?

William: Certainly those two. No, she didn't want any of Robert's limelight. I'm not sure whether she helped with *Winter in Mallorca*. I think that may have been Jan, who spoke French as well: Janet Seymour-Smith. Then Robert translated another book from Spanish, which presumably Beryl must have worked on, which is Ramon Sender's book. I don't know what's it called, now.¹⁹ The manuscript is at St John's. I think there're a couple of copies of the manuscript of the translation to English. It was never published, so it's not in your [Carl's] bibliography!²⁰ Of course, Robert's translations from Latin were all his own.

Carl: 'Christ!' was an expletive your father used all the time, and you quote him as cursing Joan Gelat. Were there other curses or imprecations you omitted from your memoir?

William: [laughter] I was called in by my housemaster at school because I was used to Robert's 'Christ!' and I went on swearing the same way. Remember, I had never really left Spain. I was going to get the slipper. That's what you got. You got the slipper or the cane,

depending on how bad it was. The slipper wasn't so bad. I got the slipper several times. When I went into the dreaded housemaster study, he realized that I had absolutely no idea what the implications of that blasphemy were. Anyway, I learned that. Part of my very useful public-school education.

Carl: Just a couple more before we stop for today. You observed Robert working with Janet Seymour-Smith on *The Greek Myths*; did you form a sense of the extent of her contributions to that work?

William: I suspect it was really very large, because you know, the amount of work in that is just vast. So, she must have done an awful lot of putting things together. I think Robert sort of did the overview, but actually I have no idea. The overall layout was certainly his. I think it would be very interesting to see the actual manuscripts. I don't know where they are. They're probably in Southern Illinois, I would have thought.²¹ It would be really very interesting to see how much she did. Then the first draft went off to Karl, so then you lose track of what's been there, but then she corrected or added more stuff. That is an enormous work; it's just incredible. I believe it was the first edition of the Greek myths to be laid out in a logical way.

Carl: Well, beyond that, let me say it's been in print for seventy years.

William: Absolutely. And it's still one of the best-selling books. And it sells in Greece as well.

Carl: Well, I did see a Greek translation of *The Greek Myths* into Greek. [laughter]

Carl: You write that Robert insisted that everyone who came to the house came as someone special. His proclivity for believing everybody around him or with whom he had friendly relations was the best and the greatest. Did he really have no irony when he expressed these opinions? He surely was let down by enough people to realize that first impressions may not always be accurate.

William: Well, possibly. If you didn't hear of them again that's probably what happened. When you first met them, they were the best and the greatest: the greatest archaeologist, the best ironsmith, or whatever, whatever it was, you know.

Carl: In *Wild Olives*, you tell a story of Pep Fontdevilla or 'Pep the Widow', and his relationship to the painter Leman. You mentioned to us that Robert and Laura kept apart from the German community in Deyá; do you see any sense of animosity between them, because of the war, perhaps?²²

William: I guess it's because the whole of Nazism was starting and I think there was already some animosity between the German group and Robert or Laura and whoever else the British group was, but I don't really know enough about that. I know the only big fight he had was with a painter, but he was a Swedish painter, not German. Robert considered the painter had been rude to Laura. They had a scuffle in front of the café, and then there was an article written in the local English paper saying something about Graves being a dictator. The press cutting is on display in the House in Deyá.²³

Carl: That was the 1934 incident in the *Palma Daily Post*?

William: That's right.

Carl: You mentioned in *Wild Olives* that Laura's presence pervaded Canellun; can you recall why you thought that?

William: Well, again, this is probably a hindsight thing, but certainly when we arrived, you know Beryl didn't even change the curtains, the drapes. Everything remained as it was when Robert had left.²⁴ So, there was no change at all in the house. All the furniture, decorations all that was in the house remained as Laura had left it.

It wasn't until later, I think, that we got some China dogs that had to come over on an airplane, or something. And Beryl inherited a

table and chest. But that was later. But generally, the whole decoration was very much as Laura had it.

Carl: Robert's international reputation seems to have followed his trips to America, beginning in 1957, and the numbers of visitors to Deyá began to swell. Ironically, Robert had retreated to Deyá to avoid mobs and here he was attracting them. Do you see that it put a strain on him?

William: I don't think so because his work ethic was still very much the same. He didn't change his routine at all. Obviously, he had a lot of fun in the States and then the Margot times came and he used to go to Madrid every once in a while to see her, or Alistair was there. So, there was a lot more travel, but then there were a lot more flights; the moving was a lot easier. But even in 1954 I was flying to England to school, so there were flights from London, two or three a week. But it was still not easy to get to the island. It wasn't really until the sixties that package tours started in earnest.

Carl: Do you sense that Deyá changed from a small Mallorcan village to an international literary empire presided over by your father?

William: No, because I don't think there were very many international writers there. There were a bunch of hippies.

Carl: We're going to get to the hippies, shortly.

William: You know, we had friends over, people like James Reeves and John Aldrich, but they had been coming all the time and it didn't really change too much, and I don't get a feeling that anything really changed.²⁵

I suppose when Huw Wheldon came with *The Monitor* film crew to do the show, it obviously upped his profile.²⁶ But Mallorca wasn't an easy place to get to; and there weren't very many hotels in Deyá, in fact just the pre-war Hotel Costa D'Or and a couple of little pensions. Again, it wasn't easy.

Carl: You note that you have the letters Robert wrote to you when you were in Oundle, and you excerpt one in your memoir. Was he pleased when you graduated? You indicate that Beryl was rather indifferent when you told her.

William: No, I remember when I failed my English literature exam. And that was a cause for celebration. [laughter] I'm not quite sure why. I failed my English literature and Robert went around boasting about it. I passed my English Language after only two years more recognition.

Carl: William, you mentioned the Deyá syndrome in *Wild Olives*, or the sense that life in Deyá was more real than life elsewhere. Richard [R. P. Graves] once mentioned to Michael in passing that while Robert was present, Deyá was magical; how much did the Deyá syndrome owe to Robert's influence?

William: Well, he had this incredible personality, obviously, you know it was hard to ignore the fact that he was there. He was just a bit larger than life. You know we were all, I think all of us children, just a little bit scared of him.

And you certainly didn't make any noise, you know. But then, of course, after I got married, things were different. Again, you grow up with these things and you don't think they're different. I suppose they were different; they would have been different for anyone looking in from the outside.

Carl: Or living somewhere else, perhaps.

William: And then, of course, in the summers well, I was pretty wild, I suppose. You know, I used to take off with the Land Rover to Palma and come back late at night. But that didn't seem to bother him too much either.

One time I remember him getting worried, and obviously Beryl had gotten worried. I was with some friends down in Lluchalcari, which is about three or four clicks down the road, and I'd walked

down there, I think. I was probably twelve that summer. And it must have been about eleven o'clock at night, and Beryl must have been getting worried, and Robert came down on his bicycle to fetch me and sort of dragged me back by my ear kind of thing. But that's the only time I have that sort of memory.

Carl: On a related topic, you note in several places in *Wild Olives* that Robert was known as *Senyor de Canellun* or simply *Senor* and you tell the story about how he stopped the Cala project by getting don Manuel Fraga, the Minister of Tourism to intervene.²⁷ You also note that he loved fixing things. Was there a sense among the villagers and *estrangers* that Robert had a big influence over the affairs of the village?

William: They didn't particularly like him going against the Cala project. But they appreciated it when, again with Fraga's help, he managed to get the main electricity to Deyá. It was held up by a lady, a countess or something, in Valldemossa who refused to have the one big pylon on her land which was required to get the electric lines over to Deyá. Until then all we had for the whole village was a little one-kilowatt generator. You could just about see the filaments of the light bulbs. [laughter] It was pathetic. And in 1963 the countess was overruled by Fraga who laid down the law, being a minister. I've just been looking at a letter of that period from Robert to Camilo Cela, in which he says, 'look I'm frightened because there are talks of people wanting to build a hotel down on the Cala, build a big road and all sorts of things like that, and I'd like to make it, Deyá, into a sort of historical monument'.

Carl: So, Robert's pulling strings with Cela?

William: Cela asked Robert, in 1959, to attend a week-long conference on 'Poetic Conversations to Formentor', which Cela organized in the middle of the Franco dictatorship. Many famous Spanish poets were present. But it was politically dangerous and in case there was trouble Cela wanted international names present. Robert was not

happy but having asked Cala a favour. . . . So, he went, and Alistair Reid, too, was there, together with French poet Vicente Aleixandre, and Tony Kerrigan, an Irish writer of Cela's. All in case there were political implications.²⁸

Anyway, so Robert had been over to Formentor, which is a hell of a trip from Deyá, across the Formentor, with Keith Baines driving our Land Rover. Keith Baines was the person who wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur*, to which Robert wrote the introduction.²⁹ Robert was just there one session and then he wrote his poem 'The Person from Porlock' about losing his concentration after one person knocked on his door collecting a small debt. And that was obviously against Cela. [laughter]

But anyway, in 1961 when he was made Professor of Poetry, he wrote to Cela and said, 'you know, you're a big name and I'm now a big name because I'm Professor of Poetry at Oxford. Can we do anything like Dali did, and get Deyá made into a historical monument, or a monumental city or something to protect it from overbuilding?' So, Robert was also working at that level.

There's so much about Robert people don't know. These are the sorts of things that haven't got into the biographies yet. The letters are full of them.

Carl: Robert Graves's interactions with the Shahs and their bogus Rubaiyat is well known, and it marks one of the few genuine defeats in Robert's life. Sorry about that. Can you recall Robert saying anything to you, or signalling some frustration or disappointment over this affair?

William: Well, the first thing is that I wasn't there. I think he was working in Ca'n Torrent. Karl had left by then. I think it took about two or three weeks to translate or put into verse the so-called translation of *The Rubaiyat*. Because of course he didn't translate anything himself. The original was in Persian. He was given a translation to basically put into verse. That was all.

I think he already confessed to Selwyn Jepson, because I have a little note here in one of my first editions – Selwyn left me all his

Graves books, all his first editions, and in *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* there's a little note saying that Robert sort of confessed to Selwyn that he had been duped.³⁰ That kind of thing. I can't remember the exact words, but I could look it up very easily.

Carl: You and I have had some fairly recent discussions about Jenny Nicholson and let me ask you, Jenny's death came as a terrible blow to you and Lucia and Robert; you note that Robert refused to attend Jenny's funeral and promised to write the real story of Solomon and Sheba as a memorial to Jenny. You say, ten years earlier, he would have done so.³¹

William: Well, that was '64. His mind was slipping. We had a puppet show at one stage for the birthday party and we had some wonderful puppets, and his hair was made out of the dog's hair, they shaved a bit of the dog's hair off and used that as Robert's hair. I remember that. And the puppet kept going around 'where are my bloody glasses, where are my bloody glasses?' That was the puppet's main theme. So that shows that he was beginning to lose his memory, then. I think he was certainly losing it even earlier. Certainly by 1966. I have a houseman's report from a hospital indicating he was already diagnosed with a memory problem.

Carl: Robert was involved with Cindy / Aemelia.³² He debouched to Mexico, from where he fired Karl, his loyal secretary, which you call 'unforgivable'. By the mid-sixties, Robert had become a distinctly unlikable father and yet, in some ways, perhaps a tragic figure.

William: And then you say 'comment'. [laughter] Well, yes. It was really because this was 1965 and he was very sick in Mexico, no one to look after him. He was still Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He had already been hospitalized, in 1959, at St Thomas's in London for a prostrate operation, and there were problems requiring blood transfusions and things. He was never really well after that. In Mexico, Cindy was, I guess, on drugs, and with some other man – I don't know who that was – called Howard. I was in Mallorca when Elena and I

decided to get married. It was the excuse for him to come back. In a way, that kind of saved his life because he might never have made it otherwise. We had moved into the Posada, Robert's guest house which was empty. And that winter, after we were married, he had a gall-bladder operation and we looked after the main house. Elena was pregnant. But Cindy was still the Muse, and she came over after a while. Things became very tense; Robert went with her to marijuana parties. Those were not easy times for Elena and me.

Carl: You say that your confrontation with Robert over the idea of the Posada was the first confrontation you ever had with him. As it happened in 1965, you would have been about twenty-seven years old. Usually, sons and fathers fall out considerably earlier.

William: I was twenty-five. But the real confrontation was early '66. It was pouring rain. Basically, he wanted Cindy to move in with us. I said, 'No bloody way'. Elena said, 'I'm leaving if she does', and then he said, 'that table over there is Cindy's'. So, I just put it outside and said, 'you can come take it'; and it was just pouring. Poor table. I feel very sorry for the table. Still, there you go. But we never got that table back either. So anyway, things remained tense.

Carl: During the whole brouhaha over the Posada, did it distress you to consider that Robert wasn't really Robert anymore, or that the Robert you knew was slipping away?

William: I guess it happened so slowly. You don't really realize it that way, but and again, you don't know whether that is his reaction to his son's marriage, or if there's some other reason. Certainly, you know we got on famously with Margot and didn't – I didn't – get on at all with Cindy. So that certainly didn't help.

Carl: Here we go with the hippies. Your story of Robert conniving with hippies to plant a packet of illegal marijuana on the premises of Can Quet would be pretty depressing for anyone who loves your

father's writing. I wonder if you could elaborate on how this sorry state of affairs came to be.

William: Well, you know he was surrounded by a whole bunch of hippies. And you know, we rented the premises of a pension, a guest house, and had a bar and restaurant as well as guests. We sort of started to represent a sort of authoritarianism, fascism, whatever else you want to call it, I suppose. And Robert and his friends thought it would be funny if the Guardia Civil, the *carabinieri*, who used to come around to Can Quet to check that we weren't selling smuggled cigarettes, would find a stash of marijuana. We used to treat them to a little swig of brandy when they visited. We had a good friend named Mac Prain who sort of kept me in the picture on what was happening in the village. And you know he told me what was planned. We found the marijuana and we burned it in the kitchen stove.

Carl: The cessation of hostilities followed your return to work from an oil rig in 1967 and perhaps, culminated in Robert's letters remarking how you impressed him with Philip and then how fond he was of Elena. Did you wonder, perhaps if Robert was capable of a full recovery or coming back all the way to how he had been?

William: No, it was obviously not the case. In fact, Elena was staying with him in Canellun, Beryl was in London, I think, Tomas was there, so Elena had to move in with him to look after him, so you know he couldn't look after himself anymore. And that's where he got to know Philip when they moved down; and I was working in Libya that winter. That was his first proper contact, you know real contact, with Elena.

Beryl didn't like driving at night, nor did she like any public events that Robert got roped into. I don't know what it was, but he was being given a medal for something or other. So, Elena had to drive him down to Palma, and stay there with him, and then drive back up, while Beryl looked after Philip. I think that's when the petrol ran out and they had to walk some eight kilometres to Valldemossa to

get petrol. That's where they got to know each other a little bit better. But these things happen.

Carl: Did you hold your father responsible for Juan's failure to thrive?³³

William: Perhaps ... not his, obviously that wasn't his problem. Juan, I think, must have had a problem from the word go; he was always a difficult child, he had a lot of tantrums; Beryl couldn't really cope with him. You know, he'd take off his glasses, fling them across the room and break them, or break plates. He once set fire to the radio. He was a problem child. I don't think it was any more Robert's fault than Beryl's fault or anyone's fault.

But when he then had his real mental breakdown problem, and we were in Can Quet, we had to take care of him, and Robert wasn't even aware – this was 1967 – that this was happening. Whether it was an overdose of the treatment he was on, or whether he had been given LSD or something similar, I don't know. We had a very nice young English nurse staying in our hotel and she travelled with him when we airlifted him back to England, and he ended up in Dr Will Sargant's hands who had been treating him and had been prescribing the drug. Sargant was the author of *Battle for the Mind*. And I don't think he was much good either. So, anyway, it's just a tragedy that started there and more or less sorted itself out.

Carl: You conclude *Wild Olives* with the news that Robert had made you executor of his will. The reader gets the sense that there was an unexpected emotional bond being revealed as well as an acknowledgement of respect and trust.

William: Maybe, maybe not. I sort of took it that way, if you like. I was just back from – I wasn't expecting this at all, obviously it just came out of the blue. I was just back from working in Tunisia, I think. I got back to Deyá, then Elena and I went down to the house to see Robert.

He had nurses looking after him and things, but only Beryl was in the house with him. Robert was sitting in his chair and after a blank look from him I went out of the room with my mother to make some coffee, leaving Elena with him, and that was when he gave his last breath. I don't actually put it that way in the book, because I wasn't actually present. (But one has to add a little bit to the book! Kind of a show!) Elena called me. And I called Beryl who was still in the kitchen making coffee. I called the doctor. Anyway, I organized the whole funeral and all the rest of it.

But it was only the next day, when we read the will, that I found out that he had made me his joint executor with Beryl's nephew Michael; so, we were co-executors. But then there were funds abroad, valuation of royalties, and this and that, complicated by the fact that we were in Spain, and Michael was perhaps just a bit out of his comfort area. So, he bowed out and left me as the sole executor of the will with everything involved in getting probate. So, I finally got that sorted and then thought, okay well, the literary agents will look after this, because that's what it says in the will. Beryl should be consulted for any unpublished manuscripts, and the royalties divided between Beryl and father's surviving children from both marriages. That's all it said.

But being executor, I began to realize that, you know ... where's the money going to be paid to? We can't expect the literary agents to pay six different people every so often. Someone's got to keep some sort of control. And that's when I started the copyright trust, so they could take over doing that part, so A. P. Watt didn't have to do it. And then eventually I realized that everyone was asking me 'what do we do, what do we do'; so, I became *de facto* literary executor. And look where it's led me: being interviewed on Zoom. [laughter]

Carl: Sort of a pinnacle for you, I suppose. [laughter] I'm going to ask you a question and you may not wish to answer it. For reasons that will become obvious. Most professional biographers are able to research and report factual material. Not all are able to capture the persona and spirit of the subject of their biography. Which

biographer or biographers best understood and conveyed the real essence of Robert Graves?

William: Ah. None so far as I can tell. Richard was great on detail. He got it down right. Miranda, she sort of came in on the wrong foot, somehow. Martin, I don't know what to believe. So, there you go.³⁴

I think, until we get Robert's letters, or a greater percentage, available to biographers, it's going to be very hard to get the true enough picture. Each letter is an experience and presumably the reason so many letters have been kept and are in libraries. Because the breadth of knowledge, which is obvious when you read his letters, never really comes through in the biographies, as far as I can tell. His incredible memory and working out of events are often developed in his correspondence. The letters reflect the amount of research he undertook when writing his historical novels or his book on how to write English or his studies of mythology, and poetry and his suggestions to other poets. Of course, he had a large library of reference books, now at St John's College, Oxford.

And when he didn't have any reference books available, as in Deyá when we got back after the war, he was resourceful. He borrowed my school-master's Spanish encyclopaedia and wrote *The Isles of Unwisdom*, about the Spanish she-admiral in the Pacific. Or when I was in hospital, he wrote his utopian *Seven Days in New Crete*.

Carl: One other question. Did Robert ever try to steer you towards a career in writing or literature or poetry?

William: [laughing] Not at all! He gave me Latin lessons. I had Martin Seymour-Smith as my tutor. And you can tell how confident Martin was of his tutoring of me: he didn't even believe I'd written *Wild Olives*. [laughter] He said, 'someone must have ghosted it for him!'

Carl: That's certainly a critique.

William: ... 'and published [it] too'. That was in the paper. I think Martin's review of *Wild Olives* said that.

Carl: I have my final question. Do you think that there are some questions, we should have asked you, but failed to do so?

William: Can't remember. [laughter]

Carl: Michael do you want to come back in?

Michael: Yes, thank you. I guess we also wanted to ask whether there was something you left out of *Wild Olives* that you would like to put in if you were going to do a second edition.

William: I haven't read it for years, and a lot of this is new to me. Obviously, I have another book in me. But when I'll ever have time to write it, I'll never know.

Michael: At the beginning of *Wild Olives*, in addition to talking about butterflies and plants, you spend a lot of time talking about food; and I was wondering whether you remember the kinds of food you ate.

William: I think I mentioned in *Wild Olives*, that, in fact, I found the school food a lot better than the Canellun food.

Michael: But what kind of food did you get in Canellun?

William: There was very little to give. There was mutton maybe once a week, and perhaps a little beef. And some chicken, but there wasn't anything very much and you'd just have stews and stews and stews, because the meat was so tough. The best present anyone ever made Beryl was a pressure cooker from the States. Cicely Gittes sent it.³⁵ The Gittes were in Deyá during the war, and they left in 1948 via the Canaries to the States. And one of the presents she sent was a pressure cooker. And that pressure cooker is still in Canellun, and I still keep it there as a memento for people to realize what 1949 pressure cookers looked like. Of course, *the great* day in Canellun was when Beryl got the Aga. That was the most important day.

But of course, what we haven't mentioned is the importance of Robert's lecture tours. Because he used to come back and say, 'You know I'm going to raid the' – I don't know how he put it – but he went to the States to bring back money. His poetry lectures were all about getting enough money basically to pay for our schooling; but it also paid to get the two fireplaces, the bedroom, sorry, his study fireplace and the dining room fireplace rebuilt, so they didn't smoke. That was a tremendous thing. And then they got this Aga from Switzerland. The Aga is a cooking stove which has two ovens at different temperatures, and it's on day and night. And Robert used to say Beryl makes the best hot cross buns in these. [laughter]

The Aga was probably the most important thing of my childhood, if you like; that was in 1957. Not of my childhood – my growing-up-hood. Food really improved.

And the thing, of course, was that Robert was no one to me; he was just my father. And it was only when I went to Oundle to school that one day the housemaster called me and to listen to a BBC program where Robert was talking about, whatever it was *The Iliad*, or whatever, probably *They Hanged My Saintly Billy*. It's one of his strangest books.³⁶ I'm not quite sure why he wrote that. Any idea Carl?

Carl: I don't know, but I will tell you, the publishers for the United States edition went to great lengths to stage these things with these protests to clear his name, and all this, you know street drama.

William: Anyway, we're now diverging, Michael.

Michael: Oh no, no. Maybe I should turn the recording off now and....

William: No, it's okay.

Michael: Okay. No, I was just interested in the kinds of food that you grew up eating, and the kinds of food that Robert liked.

William: Well, we had great salads: you had lettuce and tomatoes and you had all the aubergines and marrows. Oh, that year the cucumbers came in. We had cucumber soup, cucumber salads, cucumber – they made cucumber every which way; it became a real nightmare. It became the year of the cucumber.

But you know when you've just got a garden and that's the only way you can get food – actually you know, the village stores were very limited in what they had, just a few things, so we went to Palma every once a week and bought things; but, even then, by the end of the week we were dying to get back to Palma.

Michael: You must have had a lot of olives and almonds as well.

William: Well, yes, you had olives, and then he ... he pickled ... we had apricots. The oranges were wrapped up in *The Times Air Edition*, which was made of very thin paper. You've probably seen those. I think *The Herald Tribune* and papers like that had their airfare editions on the same paper, so we wrapped the oranges up in those, in crates.

If there were too many apricots, he got the village shop to come and pick them and sell them. He just gave it to them, so they weren't apricots all over the place. But you know I used to walk around the garden and just eat fruit all the time: anything that was in season, I'd go for it.

Michael: I think that's an interesting answer. I know nutritionists would have follow up questions that I can't think of myself. They'd probably be interested in protein and since you lived on an island, obviously you must have eaten fish.

William: We had fish. And the fisher woman used to stop by the house on her the way up to the village and leave us fish. But Beryl didn't really have much idea about it. Beryl was a city girl; she wasn't much good at cooking; she learned it a bit, but ... she was not the greatest cook in the world.

Michael: She had a lot on her hands.

William: Absolutely! No, no, well considering she came from Hampstead. Her father was a president of The Law Society. She'd been to Oxford, you know, she was an educated person, very educated.

Michael: And brilliant, of course.

William: And it was really, she really came into her own when Dunstan started working on the poems with her.

Michael: Oh, is that so?

William: Yeah. Because then she was on her own; then she could do what she wanted. She didn't have to ... there was no Robert behind....

Michael: He was really in charge?

William: Yes.

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

NOTES

¹ 'Crab' Searl or Group Captain F. H. L. (Francis Henry Louis) 'Crab' Searl was with No 211 Group or No. 211 (Medium Bomber) Group of the Royal Air Force (RAF) formed on 10 December 1941. 'Crab' was so named because of his habit of flying sideways.

² Hunting-Clan Air Transport.

³ The pilot was Captain Charles William Henry ‘Cecil’ Bebb.

⁴ Elena Lambea is the wife of William Graves. William Graves, *Wild Olives: Life in Mallorca with Robert Graves* (London: Random House, 1995), pp. 199-205.

⁵ Beryl Graves (1915-1988) was Robert Graves’s second wife, and William’s mother, and co-editor of *The Complete Poems*, vol. 1.

⁶ Laura (Riding) Jackson (1901-1991) was a poet and writer, and Robert Graves’s companion from 1929 to 1940. She and Graves collaborated on several literary projects, published and unpublished.

⁷ The *Clinica Adriano* was a hospital in Barcelona. William was riding his bicycle when he was hit by a car and badly hurt his leg. When it didn’t heal quickly, Robert brought him the Clinico Adriano where a skin graft saved his foot. *Wild Olives*, pp. 42-46.

⁸ Karl Goldschmidt ([1912?]-1995) was Graves’s ‘secretary and invaluable friend and collaborator’. He eventually changed his name to Kenneth Gay and became the curator of the Poetry Collection of the State University at Buffalo. ‘Obituaries’, *New York Times* (3 April 1995), p. B10. <<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1995/04/03/issue.html>> [accessed 15 May 2022]

⁹ William H. Waldren (1924-2003) was an artist turned archaeologist. He arrived in Deyá in 1953 and established an archaeological museum in Deyá. Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves and The White Goddess* (London: Orion Books, 1998), p. 239; *Wild Olives*, p. 138.

¹⁰ Phyllis Kaberry (1910-1977) was a social anthropologist who worked in Africa and Australia in the study of women in various societies.

¹¹ John David Graves (1920-1943) was the son of Robert Graves and his first wife Nancy Nicholson. David died in Burma in World War II.

¹² Camilo José Cela y Trulock, 1st Marquis of Iria Flavia was a Spanish novelist, poet, story writer and essayist associated with the Generation of ‘36 movement. Awarded the Nobel Prize in 1989. Cela called on Robert to attend the poets week-long conference he organized in Formentor (Mallorca). Robert was very busy at the time, went, but lost a whole day’s work (‘hence the poem “The Person from Porlock”). ‘Robert called in his “debt” trying to get Deyá protected from Tourist hotels’. Email from William Graves to transcriber 2/12/21 4:57 4:57 AM EST.

¹³ ‘Robert kept a diary from Feb. 1935 to May 1939 (at University of Victoria) and he got involved in village politics with his friend Gelat who became socialist Mayor of Deyá. Gelat was removed at the beginning of

the Civil War when the island sided with Franco. Robert stayed non-political on his return to Deyá immediately after WWII and Beryl who was staunchly socialist must have felt uncomfortable. Our having the pilot who had flown Franco, fly us down from England helped keep the authorities off his back. But just in case, he never talked politics. Before the war, Laura Riding had been vociferous and wrote political manifestos.' Email from William Graves to transcriber 2/12/21 4:57 AM EST. The diary is available online <https://graves.uvic.ca/index.html>.

¹⁴ Tomás Graves (born 1953) is the youngest child of Robert and Beryl Graves.

¹⁵ Margot Callas was married to the film director, comedian, actor, Mike Nichols from 1963 to 1974. The story of her relationships with Alistair Reid and Robert Graves is recounted in several biographies of Graves and in Simon Gough, *The White Goddess: An Encounter* (Norwich: Gallery Beggar Press, 2012). Alistair Reid (1926-2014) was a Scottish poet, scholar, translator of Jorge Luis Borges and Pablo Neruda, and writer for *The New Yorker*.

¹⁶ Gerald Gardner (1884-1964). Gardner and Idries Shah met Graves in Deyá in 1961. Shah previously wrote to Graves and arranged a meeting with him on 17 January. *Robert Graves and The White Goddess*, p. 326.

¹⁷ Idries Shah (1924-1966) wrote over three dozen books. For an account of the *Rubaiyat* controversy see *Robert Graves and The White Goddess*, pp. 446-447, 468-472.

¹⁸ Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) was a poet and writer.

¹⁹ A typescript heavily corrected in Graves's hand of *La Luna de Los Perros [Dogs Watch the Moon]* is preserved at the University of Victoria. See University of Victoria Libraries. Special Collections and University Archives. Robert Graves Collection (SC050) Subseries 11, file 3.13, Prose worksheets Gr-11-1 to Gr-11-132. <<https://uvic2.coppul.archivematica.org/prose-worksheets-gr-11-1-to-gr-11-132-dogs-watch-the-moon-la-luna-de-los-perros-by-ramon-sender-translated-into-english-by-robert-graves-n-y-1962-typescript-heavily-corrected-in-graves-autograph-131pp-fcap-gr-11-20-is-a-4-line-stanza-o>> [accessed 23 October 20022]

²⁰ Carl Hahn is doing a definitive revision of Fred Higginson's *A Bibliography of the Writings of Robert Graves* (2nd ed.) previously revised by William Proctor Williams (1987).

²¹ The Robert Graves Collection at Southern Illinois University contains about 150 pages of *The Greek Myths*, some of which are typescripts corrected by Graves and some in Graves's handwriting. Almost all are on the verso

pages of other manuscripts, so these pieces are scattered among the collection. Email from John Presley to transcriber 16/05/22 2:00 PM EST.

²² Ulrich Leman was a German painter who first traveled to Mallorca in the twenties and settled in Deyá in or about 1930. Joseph Fontedevilla, also called ‘Pep Pelat’, active in Deyá in the nineteen eighties, was a painter who specialized in flowers and landscapes. Miriam Frank, ‘Deyá’s Early Days’, *Gravesiana*, 4 (2020), 729, 748.

²³ *La Casa de Robert Graves* is a historic house museum operated by the *Fundació Robert Graves*. It opened in 2006. It was formerly Robert Graves’s home, Canellun, or ‘The House Farther On’, where he first lived with Laura (Riding) Jackson (1932-1937) and later with Beryl and their children, William, Lucia, Juan and Tomás (1946-1985). The house remained Canellun, or Canelluñ, throughout Robert’s working life, but latterly it was renamed Ca N’Alluny, ‘the correct Mallorquin for “the far house”’. R. P. Graves, *Robert Graves: The Years with Laura, 1926-1940* (New York: Viking, 1990), pp. 107, 350.

²⁴ Graves left Mallorca, along with Laura Riding, Alan Hodge, and Karl Goldschmidt, on 2 August 1936. See, *The Years with Laura*, p. 240-41.

²⁵ James Reeves (1909-1978) was a poet, playwright, literary critic, remembered especially for his children’s poetry. John Arthur Malcolm Aldrich (1905-1983) was a painter, principally of landscapes, book illustrator, designer of wallpapers and textiles. His portrait of Robert Graves hangs in the National Portrait Gallery.

²⁶ Sir Huw Prys Wheldon (1916-1986) was a Welsh broadcaster and BBC executive. He interviewed Graves in Deyá. See *Conversations with Robert Graves*, ed. by Frank L. Kersnowski (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), pp. 49-56.

²⁷ Manuel Fraga Iribarne (1922-2012) was a Spanish professor and politician in Francoist Spain. Fraga was Minister of Information and Tourism between 1962 and 1969.

²⁸ Vicente Aleixandre (1898-1984) was a Spanish poet who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1977. Anthony Kerrigan (d. 1991) was a poet and Spanish-to-English translator, including works by Borges and Unamuno.

²⁹ Keith Baines, *Le Morte d’Arthur: King Arthur and the Legends of the Round Table*; with introduction by Robert Graves (New York: New American Library, 1962).

³⁰ Selwyn Jepson (1899-1989) was a writer of mysteries, detective novels and screenplays. For more on *The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam* by

Robert Graves and Omar Ali-Shah, see Sara Greaves's essay 'Robert Graves's Mythopoetic Hospitality' in this issue.

³¹ Jenny Prydie Nicholson (1919-1964) was the daughter of Graves and his first wife, Nancy Nicholson.

³² Aemilia Laracuen (1925-2007), also known as Cindy Lee, was an American artist, and illustrator of Graves's book of poems *Love Respelt* (London: Cassell, 1965). Her relationship with Graves is recounted in several of Graves's biographies.

³³ Juan Graves (1944-2015) was the son of Robert and Beryl Graves, and brother to William.

³⁴ The biographers to whom William refers are Richard Perceval Graves, Miranda Seymour, and Martin Seymour-Smith.

³⁵ Cicely Foster Gittes (1903-2002) was a composer and her husband Archie Gittes (1903-1991) a painter.

³⁶ Oundle School, located in Northamptonshire, England, is a public school for pupils ages 11-18.

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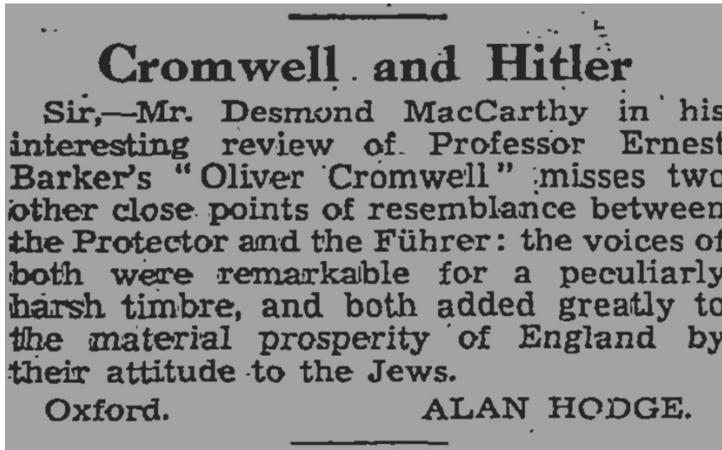
A Previously Uncredited Letter

Michael Joseph

Abstract: This note establishes Robert Graves as the author of a letter published in *The Sunday Times*, 6 June 1937 ascribed to Alan Hodge, and discusses Graves's reasons for concealing his identity as the letter writer and why he asked Hodge to assume spurious authorship.

Keywords: Oliver Cromwell, Adolph Hitler, Desmond MacCarthy, Ernest Barker, Karl Goldschmidt

On Sunday 6 June 1937, *The Sunday Times* printed a letter in response to Desmond MacCarthy's review of Ernest Barker's *Oliver Cromwell and the English People*,¹ which appeared a week earlier.



Appearances to the contrary, the author of the mocking letter was Robert Graves. Graves asked Hodge to submit the letter under his name in a letter dated 1 June.

Dearest Alan,

There is a slight letter I would like to send to *The Sunday Times* but can't, for reasons of having books published in Germany and also being Karl's official guarantor in Anglo-German passport situations. Would you honour me by being its author?

The letter Graves had written was materially the same as the one published by *The Sunday Times*.²

Aside from publicly declaring admiration for the Jewish people and ridiculing Hitler and Cromwell, the letter intends to scorn the mutually flattering comparisons of Adolph Hitler and Oliver Cromwell in MacCarthy's sycophantic review.³ Graves may also have been criticizing what he perceived as implicit support for Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement – a policy Barker vocally supported.

In his review, MacCarthy begins his portrait of Cromwell by citing Samuel Rawson Gardiner's wildly positive (1899) appraisal of *The Protector* as 'the greatest because the most typical Englishman of all time'. He then turns to Barker's more immediate view of Cromwell as 'the incarnation – perhaps the greatest we have had – of the genius of English Nonconformity'. Having established an authoritative line of thought that Cromwell is not merely admirable but inseparable from any notion the reader might have of the English national character (and therefore of himself or herself), MacCarthy then lists several traits Cromwell shares with Hitler, and the English Revolution with the National Socialist Revolution.

He praises the Nazis for unifying Germany and giving Germans new self-respect and prestige, asserting that Nazis 'feel as noble and resolute as Cromwellians'. The National Socialist Revolution, he asserts, boils down to "a reformation of manners" – to use Cromwell's phrase'. He acknowledges Nazi antisemitism in passing: the price of these improvements has been 'anti-Semitism, ubiquitous espionage, imprisonment of opponents in concentration camps,

and what Professor Barker calls “the sharp and terrible purge of midsummer 1934”.

The matter-of-factness of MacCarthy’s tone, the stage gravitas of ‘sharp and terrible’, will be uncomfortable for many readers (and for some painful), but not, alas, as Austin Woolrych reminds us, an audience of MacCarthy’s contemporaries:

In the earlier years, before the brutal and degrading aspects of fascism were fully revealed, the comparisons [with Hitler] were not always detrimental. John Buchan, for instance, in a biography of Cromwell published in 1934, could write: ‘A corporate discipline, of which quality is the watchword, seems to many the only way of salvation’.⁴

Historians base predictions on precedent and context, and Hitler was in an important sense a *sui generis* bad actor. One didn’t know that Hitler *was* Hitler. Nevertheless, 1934 was not 1937. By June 1937, the single, exposed word ‘anti-semitism’ could hardly comprehend the poisonousness of the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service of 7 April 1933 (which excluded Jews from civil service), the book burnings of books by Jews in 1933, the imposition of a 1.5 percent quota on the admission of ‘Non-Aryans’ to public schools and universities, the 1934 banishment of Jewish actors from the stage, and of course the Nuremburg Race Laws of 1935. Thus, it seems remarkable to me, and I believe it seemed remarkable to Graves, that MacCarthy felt at liberty to say: ‘Looking on from outside we wonder how the German people can tolerate many of the actions of their leader. But you see *the spirit that animates him!*’ (italics are mine).

To provide a bit of context, English sentiment in the nineteen- thirties sharply divided on how to treat German territorial expansion. The Conservatives, the House of Lords, the Royalty, the upper classes, and of course English government led by Neville Chamberlain ‘the high priest of appeasement’ argued that Hitler could be bought off, and warfare averted, and pursued a policy of appeasement with a kind of myopia that bordered on madness. The Labour Party and a

few Conservative dissenters saw the matter for what it was. In December (six months after MacCarthy's review), in a Parliamentary debate, Churchill famously warned of the 'great evils of racial and religious intolerance'.⁵

Graves had no illusions about the fascists, having been driven from Deyá the previous summer (2 August 1936) by the Spanish variety. His sarcastic echo of MacCarthy's arbitrary comparisons confirms that the casual treatment of Nazi crimes rankled him.⁶ Graves also tells Hodge he could have added that neither Cromwell nor Hitler played the piano, both were in the army, emphasizing the extent to which he viewed these comparisons as nugatory.

Expressing admiration for Jews, Graves firmly places the focus where he knows it belongs, in agreement with Churchill, who in the same speech quoted above, declares: 'it is a horrible thing that a race of people should be attempted to be blotted out of the society in which they had been born'.

Graves gives two reasons for remaining anonymous. He says he has some books in Germany whose sales he doesn't want to injure, and he is the guarantor of Karl Goldschmidt's passport. The latter reason, which governs I think, amplifies the seriousness of the review's political dimension. As readers of Graves's biographies will recall, Goldschmidt, then acting as secretary to Graves and Riding, was a young German Jew who had fled Nazi Germany.⁷ Soon after they met him in 1933, Graves and Riding befriended and then hired him to do light secretarial work. By 1935, he had become a much-loved member of their circle,⁸ and would remain Graves's secretary and collaborator for many years. As the guarantor of Goldschmidt's passport, Graves may have had two factors to keep in mind.

On the day he wrote to Hodge, he noted in his diary, 'Trouble with Karl's passport. Tried unsuccessfully to get interview with German Consul about it'.⁹ Although the matter seems to have been cleared up with a second visit to the Consulate,¹⁰ Graves would have been cautious about any public pronouncements that might provide fodder for Germans at the Consulate (whom he had reason to distrust) wishing to do harm. He may also have worried that his letter could

be read as a smack at the English authorities whose interests MacCarthy benefitted. Powerful men have thin skins, and the precariousness of Goldschmidt's position had been dramatically demonstrated a year earlier during their flight from Deyá:

This was a dangerous moment for Karl Goldschmidt. All refugees were to be returned to their own countries, and in his case this would have meant being compelled to board the *Graf Spee*, a German pocket-battleship in Palma harbour, en route for Germany and a concentration camp'. (*Years with Laura*, p. 241)

Robert 'pleaded strongly' on his behalf and persuaded the authorities to permit Goldschmidt to board the *Grenville* with them, instead.¹¹ The narrow escape impressed Graves – more lastingly perhaps than Goldschmidt, who may not have grasped the danger. When Germany revoked all Jewish passports in October 1938, Graves fired off a letter to warn him, and he replied: 'This passport withdrawal about which you write: I have had no idea that this was on the programme again: your mentioning it is the first I heard about it'.¹²

Alan Hodge was the logical person for Graves to turn to. He had been in Mallorca the previous summer and fled alongside Graves, Riding and Goldschmidt. He would have accepted Graves's explanation immediately. And their friendship was fresh – Hodge would entertain Graves and Riding on 8 June, two days after the letter appeared in *The Sunday Times*, and ten days after that, Hodge and Beryl Pritchard, whom Graves had met in January, would visit them at their flat in Nottingham (*Years with Laura*, p. 275). While Graves humbly asks Hodge to 'honour him' by signing the letter, Hodge surely understood it was certainly no less an honour to be asked.¹³

The phrase 'would you honour me by being its author?' might be understood as a mere courtesy, and perhaps it was that; but for Graves, a deep believer in symbols and rituals, asking Hodge to sign his name to the letter was a meaningful personal gesture that signified an exchange of gifts. Submitting himself to Graves's will – an act of self-subordination and deference – Hodge assumes the identity of

the author of the letter – an act of possession, of assertion. This commingling of identities represents a reciprocal honour and a bond that would eventuate in two successful collaborations: *The Long Weekend* (1940), and *The Reader Over Your Shoulder* (1943).

One final note: In his review, Ernest Barker repeats the tradition that Cromwell admitted the Jews into England in 1656. Graves appears to accept the tradition, although one contradicted by fact. The Jews were not readmitted to England in 1656, nor was Cromwell a friend of the Jews, although perhaps Graves suspected MacCarthy would not have known that.

Many thanks to William Graves for permission to reprint the contents of the letter to Alan Hodge. It was he who discovered the letter unmasking his father as the author of the letter within the letter published in *The Sunday Times*.

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NOTES

¹ Ernest Barker, *Oliver Cromwell and the English People* (Cambridge University Press, 1937).

² The transcript of the letter, courtesy of William Graves:

Villa Guidi – etc.
[Lugano]

June 1, [1937]

Dearest Alan,

There is a slight letter I would like to send to *The Sunday Times* but can't, for reasons of having books published in Germany and also being Karl's official guarantor in Anglo-German passport situations. Would you honour me by being its author?

Dear Sir,

Mr Desmond Macarthy [sic] in his interesting review misses two other close points of resemblance between the Protector and the Führer. The voices of both were remarkable for a particularly harsh timbre, and both added greatly to the material prosperity of England by their attitude to the Jews.

Yours, etc.

A. Hodge

That's all ... of course, one think of many other points of resemblance, e.g. neither of them could play the piano, both of them at one time or other served as soldiers, but I think these others are enough. So looking forward to seeing you.

Love,

Robert

& from Laura

& Karl

I have written 12 (twelve) poems in Lugano

An Italian joke: why is the *Duce* like a chamber-pot? [Drawing]
 Answer: The chamber pot only has one handle; the *Duce* has two.
 Only I can't draw akimbo *Duce*'s: One tells the joke dramatically a-kimboing oneself, first with one arm then with two, & making a motor-bicyclist scowl for the *Duce*.

(RG-Hodge, Alan 1937-06-01 Text © Trustees of the Robert Graves Copyright Trust.)

³ MacCarthy is repeating Barker's comparison, which Barker had originally rehearsed in an address before the Freidrich Sthamer-Gesellschaft in Hamburg in 1936. Austin Woolrych, 'The Cromwellian Protectorate: A Military Dictatorship', *History*, 75.244 (January 1990), 207. In the review, it's unclear to me where Barker ends and MacCarthy begins.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 207.

⁵ Winston Churchill, *Foreign Affairs*, volume 330, column 1830: debated 21 December 1937. Great Britain. UK Government. Parliament. House of Commons. (Hansard: Government Publications, 2022) <<https://>

hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1937-12-21/debates/394f0b9e-0d23-49cc-9187-2244c98cce29/ForeignAffairs> [accessed 23 April 2022]

⁶ These are Barker's comparisons, but MacCarthy repeats them without comment, which must be read as implicit endorsement.

⁷ Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves: The Years with Laura, 1926-1940* (New York: Viking, 1990), p. 214.

⁸ Miranda Seymour, *Robert Graves: Life on the Edge* (New York: Holt, 1995), p. 227. Seymour dedicated her biography of Graves to Karl who in 1940 changed his last name from Goldschmidt to Gay.

⁹ 'June 1 Tuesday', 1 June 1937, *Diary of Robert Graves 1935-39 and Ancillary Material*, University of Victoria, 2003 <https://graves.uvic.ca/diary_1937-06-01.html> [accessed 1 June 2022]

¹⁰ Graves's diary for 3 June reads: 'To German Consulate. Persuaded the woman there to phone Zurich for an extension of Karl's passport: she made the plea that [he] would lose his employment and be on their hands. He consented.' 'June 3 Thursday', 3 June 1937, *Diary* <https://graves.uvic.ca/diary_1937-06-03.html> [accessed 1 June 2022]

¹¹ In 1953, Simon Gough was told by his mother, Diana Graves (the daughter of Robert's half-brother Richard 'Dick' Graves) that Graves won the day by 'refusing to leave Majorca on the last British destroyer unless Karl could accompany him'. (Simon Gough, *The White Goddess: An Encounter*. London: Galley Beggar Press, 2012), Kindle ed. location 845.

¹² Goldschmidt to Graves and Riding, 15 October 1938, *Diary* <https://graves.uvic.ca/diary_1938-10-17_01_enc.html?ssMark=Goldschmidt#noteMarker_3> [accessed 22 April 2022]

¹³ One sees this usage in Graves's writing again almost thirty years later in a letter to the anthologist Louis Untermeyer in which he mentions having been invited by the Swedish Academy to write in support of Robert Frost's 1963 Nobel Prize nomination. 'I told them to honour themselves, before it was too late, by honouring Robert Frost (name in large caps)'. (Graves to Louis Untermeyer, 13 January 1963. In private collection).

Verses for Margaret Russell

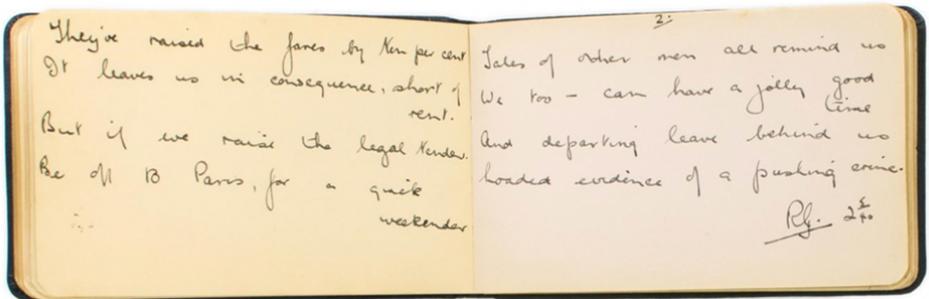
Carl Hahn and Michael Joseph

Abstract: This note brings to light an unrecorded poem written by Robert Graves in 1940 for Margaret J. Russell, who had been Jenny Nicholson's nanny, 1919-1921.

Keywords: occasional verse, domestic life, Margaret Russell

The eight-line unpublished poem is written on the verso and recto of facing leaves in a small oblong autograph book that belonged to Margaret J. Russell (née Reed), whose signature appears on the front pastedown.¹

Miranda Seymour describes Russell as 'a doting Geordie nanny'.² Graves and his wife Nancy Nicholson hired her in March 1919 to look after Jenny, their first child. Although she and Jenny became virtually inseparable, 'doting' underplays her stature and influence in the family. Richard P. Graves describes her as having a 'warm heart and [a] fund of common sense [...] able to temper Nancy's rigid adherence to the latest set of up-to-date methods for bring up children'.³ He says that Margaret was a forceful person who apparently took over management of the house, 'having charge of the money, & giving R & N pocket-money weekly out of their own money'.⁴



Two years later, however, in February 1921, Nancy dismissed her for ‘spoiling little Jenny’ (Seymour, p. 100), or perhaps, for failing ‘to follow [...] strict instructions as to diet and daily routine’ for Jenny and David,⁵ their young son. By this point, what seems to have become a conflict between the warm-hearted, old-fashioned Margaret (a self-described ‘stick-in-the-mud’) and the modern, ideological and slightly frazzled Nancy (with Graves caught in the middle) led Margaret to fall ill: an illness that Graves’s mother, Amy, called a nervous breakdown.⁶

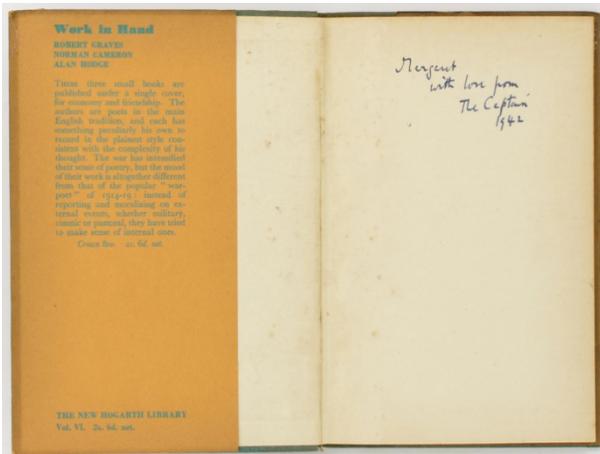
Dismissing Margaret took a curious form. Rather than break the news themselves, Robert and Nancy sent her to Graves’s parents in Wales ‘on the pretext of a holiday [...] relying on Amy to hand her their letter of dismissal’ (Wilson, p. 266; Assault, pp. 241-42).

Imagine the effect on Margaret. For two years, Jenny had been the centre of her life, as if she were Jenny’s mother.

Margaret was working at a doll’s dress for Jenny when told of her dismissal; and she cried out: ‘Oh my Jenny! My darling Jenny!’ in floods of tears. APG who witnessed this miserable scene, wrote sympathetically in his diary that evening: ‘I hope Nancy will get as faithful a servant in her place’”. (p. 242)

Despite everything, Margaret remained on affectionate terms with Graves, as the many entries in his diary (1935-1939)⁷ attest, portraying a warm friendship that involved gift-giving, teas, walks, gossipy personal confidences, movies, even a proposed trip with Riding to France. (Might this have been the ‘quick week-ender’ to which Graves’s autograph refers?)

Along the way, Margaret fell into the habit of addressing Graves as ‘Captain’ and referred to him as ‘The Captain’, the rank he’d achieved in the Royal Welch Fusiliers.⁸ Graves gave himself to the practice cheerfully, for example inscribing her copy of his *Work in Hand*: ‘To Margaret with love from The Captain, 1942’.



Photograph courtesy of Michael Treloar, Bookseller.

Her surviving letters suggest she was able to speak freely to him and trusted her opinions would be valued. In 1948, soon after his friends Dorothy and Montagu Simmons and their children left England for America to join Riding and her new companion and collaborator, Schuyler Jackson, on their farm at Wabasso to work on the etymological dictionary project,⁹ Margaret wrote to Graves sharing her doubts about the prospects of their adventure:

They have a bungalow near the Jacksons and are now in the throes of grapefruit picking and packing for export ... I feel they have done the wrong move, but I am such a stick-in-the-mud I may be wrong. (R. P. Graves, *White Goddess*, p. 150)

Margaret was not wrong: the Simmonses were soon scrambling to return home.

In 1941, a year after inscribing the verse in her autograph book, Graves and his new wife, Beryl, re-hired Russell to come to Vale House for 'five or six weeks' to help with the housework.¹⁰ Margaret Russell would remain close to The Captain, as the inscription in *Work in Hand*, demonstrates, and in the fall of 1959, when Graves was convalescing at St Thomas Hospital in London, after an

emergency prostatectomy and ensuing complications, Margaret came to visit (p. 34).

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Carl Hahn is Bibliography Editor of *The Robert Graves Review*. He is presently revising and updating Fred Higginson’s bibliography of Robert Graves. Recent publications include ‘The Plague of Modern Scholarship: Theses and Dissertations on the Subject of Robert Graves’ in *The Robert Graves Review*, 1.1 (2021).

NOTES

¹ They’ve raised the fares by ten per cent.
It leaves us in consequence, short of rent.
But if we raise the legal tender,
Be off to Paris, for a quick weekender.

Tales of other men all remind us
We too – can have a jolly good time
And departing leave behind us
Loaded evidence of a pushing crime.

RG. 2 5 / 40

Autograph book in private collection.

² Miranda Seymour, *Robert Graves: Life on the Edge* (New York: Holt, 1995), p. 89.

³ Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves and The Assault Heroic, 1895-1926* (New York: Viking, 1987), p. 213.

⁴ Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves and the White Goddess, 1940-1985* (New York: Viking, 1990), p. 34.

⁵ Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Robert Graves: From Great War Poet to 'Good-bye to All That' (1895-1929)* (New York: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018), p. 266. R. P. Graves notes differences between Nancy and Margaret that contributed to the frosting of their relationship, such as Nancy's refusal to allow Margaret to teach her children prayers (*Assault*, pp. 230, 241).

⁶ *Assault*, p. 362.

⁷ Robert Graves, *Diary of Robert Graves 1935-39 and Ancillary Material*. University of Victoria, 2003 <<https://graves.uvic.ca/index.html>> [accessed 24 April 2022]

⁸ R. P. Graves, *White Goddess*, p. 34.

⁹ The dictionary project, called variously *The Dictionary of Exact Meanings* and *The Dictionary of Related Meanings*, was a kind of etymological dictionary, but one in which Riding and Graves – and ultimately Riding and Jackson – would include the poetic meanings of words. See T. S. Matthews, *Jacks or Better: A Narrative* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 157.

¹⁰ R. P. Graves, *White Goddess*, pp. 296-97.

Derick Boothby's *The White Goddess*

Steven Michael Stroud

Abstract: This essay is an examination of a signed and bound copy of *The White Goddess* that once belonged to Major Frederick Boothby, a member of the Bricket Wood Coven, the first modern Wiccan Coven, and a glance at his ten-year correspondence with Robert Graves.

Keywords: Wicca, Frederick Alexander Colquhoun Boothby, Rosalie May Julia Loveday

I had always wanted to own a book signed by Robert Graves. He is by far my favourite poet. His prose stands alone, without peers. His skill at translating and his unique views of mythology fascinate me. While searching one night for just the right treasure, I came upon a signed copy of the 1961 Faber Paperback Edition of *The White Goddess*. This was an expanded and enlarged edition, though the publisher was downplaying that fact. Books printed prior to 1966 contain no ISBN. The copyright page simply reads, 'Faber 1961'. There is a reference to this edition in *WorldCat*, with an OCLC identifier of 560153136. The original first edition of this work was published in 1948 by Vintage Books with the OCLC identifier, 1319479372. The particular copy I purchased was the 1961 Faber Paperback Edition purveyed by Brimstones in England. However, this copy was exceptional, rebound in black Moroccan leather with a Yapp edge, in the style of family bibles, and stamped in metallic silver lettering. It was by far the most economical option out of all the signed copies of *The White Goddess* I viewed. Further, its uniqueness attracted me.

St. John's College
Oxford

Telephone 4767112

Oct 27
1961

Dear Derek and Rosalind

No particular news,
except that I am enjoying
as a professor and going on
with my ordinary life.

See a lot of Dries which
these days: he & I think very
much alike and unravel each
other's problems and share
an awareness.

It's been a bad year but not
me of defect.

Reminds

Yours ever
Robert

Boothby & I share a crazy flat in Boars Hall
home again in December

When I opened the package from Brimstones, an envelope containing a letter from William Graves, the author's eldest surviving son, fell out of the book. The letter was dated 25 April 1996 and written to architect Peter Page (now deceased). Page had written to ascertain the identities of 'Derick and Rosalie', the original owners of the book. William didn't know but suggested perhaps 'Derick' was the poet Dereck Savage. He said that he felt compelled to send Mr Page's letter to the Robert Graves Trust Researcher at St John's College Oxford to record the existence of the signed copy. Page was an astute book collector who had amassed over 15,000 books in his lifetime. When he passed away, the first pick of his books went to the Beinecke Library at Yale University, the rest were then sold at auction. Brimstones of England acquired what was left after the auction. As far as I could tell, Page never did learn the identities of 'Derick and Rosalie'; the responsibility to solve this mystery had fallen to me.

However, the book had not exhausted its store of surprises. Further inspection uncovered a small note written from Robert Graves on St Johns College letterhead to 'Derick and Rosalie', dated 27 October 1961.¹ The title leaf had two unique modifications. Graves had signed the title page in blue pencil, adding in red, 'Blessed Be She'.² And on the verso, someone had attached a beautiful black and white card of a woman's portrait surrounded by vines and leaves. The lower left corner of the card was signed simply 'Loveday'. In an email to William, I shared my discoveries and hoped he might have gleaned more information about the identities of 'Derick and Rosalie'. William kindly and promptly replied on 25 July 2021. He was now able to identify them as Major Frederick 'Derick' Alexander Colquhoun Boothby (1 September 1909-27 February 1979) and Rosalie May Julia Loveday (dates unknown). When Robert Graves had written to them, Rosalie and Derick were dating, though they subsequently married on 24 July 1965 (Graves's 70th birthday). Rosalie became Derick's third wife. Armed with this knowledge and with some assistance from the Robert Graves Society on Facebook, I began to unravel a strange and intriguing tale. I discovered Graves had had a lengthy correspondence with Frederick 'Derick' Boothby

and written a few letters to Rosalie Loveday (revolving around *The White Goddess*).

Boothby had written to Graves on 20 January 1960, introducing himself as the leader of several covens in the British Witch Cult. Between 1960 and 1971, they exchanged more than ninety letters, a significant number of which are held by two repositories: The Ellsworth Mason Collection of Robert Graves, 1917-1975, at the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma,³ and the Robert Graves Special Collection at St John's College, Oxford.⁴ In a letter housed at Oxford, dated 6 May 1961, Boothby mentions that he is awaiting delivery of the new Faber 1961 edition of *The White Goddess*, and asks Graves if he would be kind enough to sign it for him, promising to have the book properly rebound. Boothby bound Graves's reply (see above) into this copy of *The White Goddess*.

A Note about *The White Goddess* and Witches

The White Goddess had a substantial cultural impact on the witchcraft community.⁵ It was a book written at just the right time. The nineteen sixties were of course a revolutionary decade. During this period, Graves was fielding numerous inquiries from people in counter-cultural groups:

After 1961, the steady trickle of letters Graves received about the book swelled into a torrent. Experts real and self-styled, in archaeology and early Welsh, in runes and classical studies, in witchcraft and pharmacology, wrote to offer 'corrections' (often themselves of dubious correctness) and extensions to his theories. (Lindop, p. xix)

The stature of *The White Goddess* and its relevance to the Wiccan Community were not lost on Boothby, who was an authentic practicing witch. He was an original member of the Bricket Wood Coven, the first modern Wiccan Coven formed by Gerald B. Gardner.⁶ He began writing to Graves after another witch, Anthony 'Tony'

Melachrino, had received a favourable response to a letter asking Graves how he could best serve The Goddess. Graves stated that he was not a witch, nor did he belong to any secret societies. However, Lindop suggests Graves was not averse to Wiccan practices.



Rosalie May Julia Loveday, untitled, 1960.

By the early 1960s, magicians and witches of several kinds were writing to Graves, and the correspondence was not always one-sided: he seems to have been willing to give advice on matters of ritual as well as on the use of hallucinogens. (Lindop, p. xix)

It cannot be credibly denied that Graves believed that witches were essential to the continued cultural presence of the White Goddess,

herself. In a letter dated 12 July 1960, he intimates to Boothby that he has been in communication with Mr William Morris, a New York millionaire appeared willing to finance a film based on *The White Goddess*. Morris asked Graves what witches had to do with the story, to which he replied: 'they kept the Goddess Religion alive throughout the Middle Ages in a most historic style'. Graves took Boothby seriously as an authority on witchcraft, and Boothby played up his importance in the religion. In a letter dated 10 June 1960, Graves offers him a part in a witch sequence in this (regrettably) ill-fated film.

In addition to being a prominent witch, Boothby was many things in his lifetime. He attained the rank of captain in the British Army during World War II.⁷ Retiring from the army in 1953, he was given the honorary rank of major in the Company of London Yeomanry.⁸ He was also an avowed Scottish Nationalist, and printed his own newsletter *Sgian Dubh* in 1963, and founded the 1320 Club in 1967.⁹ He was also involved in the formation of the 'Army of the Provisional Government', more commonly known as the Tartan Army.¹⁰ The latter involvement was to lead to his demise from terrorist activities against the Crown and a failed bank robbery.¹¹

Rosalie and *The White Goddess*

Rosalie May Julia Loveday was quite a bit more elusive. In his letters, Boothby tells Graves only that she is an artist whose works had appeared in the Royal Academy of Arts. She is best remembered for her portrait of the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid. Overshadowed by her husband, Loveday was pivotal for me in establishing the provenance of this book and provides us with an interesting sidelight on Graves's infatuation with Margot Callas.

For the holiday season of 1960, Loveday decided to make an engraving for a Christmas card (which eventually became the card glued to the title leaf of my book). When he saw the card, Graves flipped over it. In his eyes, the portrait was an exact likeness of Callas, the woman he wanted to play the Goddess in the film and his current muse. Characteristically, he refused to believe it was

coincidental, and insisted that Rosalie must possess some magical intuition. He requested twelve copies of the card from Boothby, which Loveday graciously provided (letters 3 January 1961-23 February 1961).¹²

It is unsurprising that to Graves's lovestruck eyes, a portrait of a beautiful woman resembled his beloved; however, in my view, the image on the card does look strikingly like Callas. To date, I have located no other copies of this card at St John's or the University of Tulsa. The only other reference to it turns up in letters Mason wrote to Derick and Rosalie in 1969, attempting to obtain a copy. Arrangements were mentioned in several letters, and Rosalie apparently sent Mason several copies. There is no record of his ever receiving them and there are no copies in the Mason Collection. The card, with its uncanny resemblances, remains just as elusive as its artist.

Ellsworth Mason

The bulk of the correspondence at the University of Tulsa was purchased from Mason.¹³ Mason began writing to Boothby in the late nineteen sixties. He was putting together a collection of letters and ephemera relating to Graves and offered to buy Graves's letters in Boothby's possession. Boothby accepted the offer, further agreeing on 22 April 1969 to sell Graves's letters exclusively to Mason. At this point, their correspondence had been quiescent for about five years, however, perhaps galvanized by the promise of monetary gain, Boothby resumed corresponding. But Graves's letters lacked their previous sharpness and force. Boothby could see the traces of the dementia that would claim the final years of the poet's life, as could Mason. In December 1971, Mason deprecated Graves's latest letters,¹⁴ and Boothby conceded that Graves seemed to be 'fuzzy', and informed Mason he did not anticipate any further letters.

The value of this beautifully modified 1961 Faber paperback edition of *The White Goddess* turned out to be much greater than I expected. It

is a living piece of history that is not only integral to the story of Frederick A. C. Boothby but a unique link to the idiosyncratic, wide-ranging intelligence of one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century. Boothby rightly treasured his copy of the book. In a letter dated 3 May 1970, he says, melancholically, he has grown weary of the world and is putting his affairs in order and composing his will. His last wish is to have the dedicatory poem to the Goddess read at his funeral.¹⁵ I hope someday to discover that his wish was granted.

The author wishes to thank The Robert Graves Society for research advice, the University of Tulsa, St John's College, Oxford, and the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, England for pulling correspondences from their collections, William Graves and the Robert Graves Trust for allowing me to quote from unpublished letters, and Philip Heselton for his knowledgeable advice and research assistance.

Steven Michael Stroud is an independent scholar and researcher. Currently, he is exploring Major Frederick A. C. Boothby and his role in shaping mid-twentieth-century British witch cults. He may be contacted via email at: stevenmichaelstroud@outlook.com.

NOTES

¹ Graves to Boothby, 27 October 1961, St Johns College, Oxford, England.

² Grevel Lindop notes that Graves used these colours to edit his work. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997), p. xxi.

³ In 1972, Ellsworth Mason started the first journal dedicated to the study of Robert Graves, *Focus on Robert Graves*.

⁴ These collections are incompletely processed, hence the absence of more precise cataloguing information.

⁵ See also Grevel Lindop, 'From Witchcraft to the Rubaiyyat: Robert Graves and the Shah Brothers', in *The Art of Collaboration: Essays on*

Robert Graves and his Contemporaries, ed. by Dunstan Ward (Palma: Edicions UIB, c2008).

⁶ Gerald B. Gardner was prominent in bringing the contemporary pagan religion of Wicca to public attention. A plaque attached to his grave describes him as the ‘Father of Modern Wicca. Beloved of the Great Goddess’. For more on Gardner, see Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 205-239.

⁷ R. M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁸ *Supplement to The London Gazette*, 13 March 1953, p. 1431.

⁹ Hugh MacDiarmid, *New Selected Letters*, ed. by Dorian Grieve and Owen Dudley (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001), p. 536.

¹⁰ *Encyclopedia of British and Irish Political Organizations*, ed. by Peter Barberis, and others (London: Pinter, 2000), p. 409.

¹¹ Arnold Kemp, *Confusion to Our Enemies: Selected Journalism of Arnold Kemp (1939-2002)*, ed. by Jackie Kemp (Glasgow: Neil Wilson, 2012).

¹² Graves to Boothby, 3 January 1961-23 February 1961, University of Tulsa.

¹³ Cf. <<https://utulsa.as.atlas-sys.com/repositories/2/resources/422>> [accessed 31 July 2022]

¹⁴ Mason to Boothby, 7 December 1971, University of Tulsa.

¹⁵ Boothby to Graves, 3 May 1970, University of Tulsa.

Introduction to *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*

Patricia T. O'Conner

Abstract: This is the introduction to the Seven Stories Press reissue of *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*, a writing handbook co-authored by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, published originally in 1943. The Seven Stories Press edition with this introduction appeared in 2018.

Keywords: writing, English, handbooks, readers

This is the best book on writing ever published. It's the sanest, most rigorous examination of English prose style to be found anywhere, and it may also be the most peculiar. I doubt that we'll see its like again.

An extraordinary book written in extraordinary times, *The Reader Over Your Shoulder* was begun in the summer of 1940, just after the fall of France and the evacuation of Allied forces at Dunkirk. Europe was now overrun by demagogues. Robert Graves, the celebrated English poet, novelist, and man of letters, had already fled his home in Majorca ahead of Franco's troops and returned to England, a country that now feared for its life.

Graves and Alan Hodge, his researcher and collaborator, had just finished writing *The Long Week-End*, a social history of Britain between the wars. It was an overview of life in the twenties and thirties, and might be summarized as 'How the British let their hair down in peacetime'. The authors now felt that a similar laxity had crept into writing, which even at the highest levels had become 'loose, confused and ungraceful'. With a new war to be won, the kingdom couldn't afford careless, sloppy English. Good communication was critical, but Graves and Hodge were afraid that English prose in its current state was not up to the task: 'We regard the present crisis as acute enough to excuse this book'.

Their proposal, put simply, is that writers should anticipate readers' questions, then answer them clearly, logically, and with a minimum of fuss. Some assembly is required, but instructions are included.

Modestly subtitled 'A Handbook for Writers of English Prose', the book was never merely that. *The Reader Over Your Shoulder* has been called the authors' contribution to the war effort. It would be too much to say that they thought good English could save the world. But to Graves and Hodge, clear and logical prose was not a mere nicety: 'The writing of good English is [...] a moral matter, as the Romans held that the writing of good Latin was'.

The title sums up their theme, stated early in the book: 'We suggest that whenever anyone sits down to write he should imagine a crowd of his prospective readers (rather than a grammarian in cap and gown) looking over his shoulder'. By imagining readers' questions, the authors say, 'the writer will discover certain tests of intelligibility'. These tests, outlined in Part I, consist of forty-one principles for writing, twenty-five devoted to clarity and sixteen to grace of expression. Each principle is carefully defined, then illustrated by snippets of writing that fail the test.

In Part II, Graves and Hodge reverse this process. They analyse more than fifty short passages by eminent contemporary writers, applying line by line the principles laid out in Part I. But they don't just point out shortcomings. They actually rewrite the passages. This took a lot of nerve, considering that they were correcting people like T. S. Eliot, Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley, Ernest Hemingway, John Maynard Keynes, Cecil Day-Lewis, Ezra Pound, Stephen Spender, H. G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw. (One of their friends suggested as a subtitle 'A Short Cut to Unpopularity'.)

Their purpose was not to sneer at the mighty, but to show that occasionally even the best writers are careless or inattentive. In choosing their samples, the authors explain, they simply took up a book or article by each writer, then 'read on at our usual speed until we found ourselves bogged in a difficult passage. This passage became the subject of our analysis'.

Each sample – whether from a prime minister or a popular novelist – is subjected to the same forty-one principles. There should be no

doubt in the reader's mind as to who, what, when, where, how much, how long, and so on. No word or phrase should be ambiguous or out of place. Sentences should be linked logically and intelligibly. Ideas should follow one another in a natural order. Metaphors should be handled with care. Nothing unnecessary should be included, nothing necessary omitted.

After rewriting each sample Graves and Hodge add a general comment, sometimes excusing a writer because of extenuating circumstances, sometimes adding insult to injury. But the comments are fair (even the acerbic ones) and infuse the book with a personality all its own.

After finding thirty-three faults in a paragraph by Pound, the authors tartly remark, 'Ezra Pound's writing is wilfully loose – not a natural half-apologetic "barbaric yawp" like Walt Whitman's, but yawp for yawp's sake'. The head of Harrow School also gets demerits: 'Headmasters, like bishops, suffer from an occupational disability: it is very seldom that people venture to criticize their literary style. The headmaster style is usually an uneasy mixture of semi-ecclesiastical oratory, Government Department English, and colloquialisms intended to disarm the natural hostility of schoolboys'. And after dissecting an excerpt by Alfred North Whitehead, they conclude: 'Professor Whitehead is generally acknowledged to be the most thorough, acute and original of contemporary British philosophers. It is strange to find him unbending in this popular work: becoming as conversationally loose as any feather-headed undergraduate'.

At times, Graves and Hodge can't resist slyly poking fun. Citing a garbled announcement from the Ministry of Agriculture, they write: 'This paragraph has suffered from collective authorship; no single person could possibly have written so confusedly by himself'. In illustrating the need to avoid distraction, they point to the poet Hart Crane, who 'decided that he could not write his best except with a radio or victrola playing jazz at him and street-noises coming up through the open window. He considered that distraction was the chief principle of modern living; he cultivated it, distractedly, and committed suicide in his early thirties'. In demonstrating how not

to use metaphors, they quote a line from a Graham Greene novel: 'Kay Rimmer sat with her head in her hands and her eyes on the floor'. Their reply: 'And her teeth on the mantelpiece?'

Perhaps anticipating objections, the authors pledge that 'we have wrenched no quotation unfairly from its context'. In fact, they sometimes soften a critique by putting a writer's faults into perspective. 'This passage is in the table-talk tradition, and has the hit-or-miss charm of the dessert course', they comment on an excerpt by Clive Bell. 'It was written during the most prosperous and care-free period between the two World Wars'. Here they sympathize with a bureaucrat who's forced to pussyfoot around a topic: 'Lord Halifax in making this speech, as a Minister without portfolio, was restrained by many considerations from saying frankly what he meant'. Their revision, they add, 'represents what he would no doubt have said, had he been in a less delicate position'.

Always they come down on the side of sober common sense. In explaining Principle Nine, 'No word or phrase should be ambiguous', they quote this vague line from a travel book: 'The Socialist authorities in Vienna built cheap modern flats for the workers'. Graves and Hodge raise the natural objection that any reader would: 'Were they cheap to build? Or cheap to live in? Or both?' A fault like this, they point out, can have graver consequences: 'The disastrous charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava in the Crimean War was made because of a carelessly worded order'.

Some of their forty-one principles may appear to overlap, the authors note, 'but look into any carpenter's tool-bag and see how many different hammers, chisels, planes and screwdrivers he keeps there – not for ostentation or luxury, but for different sorts of jobs'.

This workmanlike approach is typical of the book. To the claim that 'English is an illogical, chaotic language, unsuited for clear thinking', Graves and Hodge reply that 'often the apparent chaos is only the untidiness of a workshop in which a great deal of repair and other work is in progress', one in which 'the old workman can lay his hand on whatever spare parts or accessories he needs or at least on the right tools and materials for improvising them'.

The message: Given patience and the proper tools, any of us can write better, clearer English. Furthermore, we have a responsibility to do so.

Because the authors reflect the Britain of their time, there are references to food rationing, air raids, and naval blockades. But whiffs of the past detract in no way from the book. If anything, they add to its eccentric charm and testify to its durability. In the power of its arguments, its clear-eyed good sense, its practical wisdom, *The Reader Over Your Shoulder* is timeless.

Fortunately, the first edition, published in London and New York in 1943, is the version you're about to read. We're lucky to have it back.

The only disservice that Graves and Hodge did to *The Reader Over Your Shoulder* was to abridge it for a second edition in 1947. They deleted big chunks of the text – 156 pages in all. In the process, a handful of errors crept in, and thirty-six of the passages examined in Part II were eliminated, including those by Hemingway, Pound, Huxley, Lewis, and Spender.

The authors also discarded five absorbing chapters showing how English prose style developed from Anglo-Saxon times to the twentieth century. This section amounts to a highly opinionated, and typically Gravesian, history of English writing, and it's a pleasure in itself. As the authors demonstrate in the first edition, 'Every social and political change was marked by a corresponding change in the character of prose'. The book lost something of its soul when it lost those chapters. Now all this has been restored and a new generation of writers can discover the book in its original form. I should add here 'a new generation of readers'. Those forty-one principles work both ways; they make for better reading as well as better writing. They can show a reader what's wrong with something that rings false or doesn't make sense or leaves questions unanswered. In a climate where rumours, impressions, and outright lies are sometimes treated as fact, informed readers are more important than ever. No democracy can afford to be without readers who can ask the right questions, who can critically judge what they read, who can mentally peer over an author's shoulder.

'Faults in English prose', Graves and Hodge write, 'derive not so much from lack of knowledge, intelligence or art as from lack of thought, patience or goodwill'. A world that still suffers from thoughtless, impatient, and manipulative prose still needs *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*. Long may it live.

Patricia T. O'Conner is a former staff editor at *The New York Times Book Review*, and the author of five books on language, most recently *Origins of the Specious*.

Editor's note: We would like to thank Ms O'Conner and The Seven Stories Press for permission to reprint this text.

POEMS

Joseph Thomas

ADVICE FOR CHILDREN

Children, if you dare to think
Of the rareness, muchness
Fewness of this precious only
Endless world in which you say
You live, you think of things like this:
Gym showers full of boys and girls
Snapping towels, red welts on rears,
Refracted sun and polished glass,
And squirming ants consumed by flame,
The roll of dice (we call it craps)
And the give of cash held tight in
Hand (winnings won through guile and cheat),
And acrid smoke from stolen fags,
And 'gateway drugs' swinging wide
Straight on through to the other side.
Such treasures wait in small, ziplocked
Bags, plastic keys to worlds unspied:
Take them, Children, make them your own!
For who dares undo the parcel
Finds themselves at once outside it:
Snapping towels and pinching rears
Burning ants and smoking smokes
Shooting craps and rolling joints
And buying bags of skag from friends
Instead of sitting alone and grim
With unwrapped parcels about your bed.
And if only then you should dare to think
Of the fewness, muchness, rareness,
Greatness of this endless only
Precious world in which you say
You live – it will be too late.

Dunstan Ward

A RADIANT CERTITUDE

in memory of Anne Mounic

It was Robert Graves who brought us together.
You devoted your thesis to Graves's poetry,
which I was co-editing with his widow;
we shared a reading at the Club des Poètes.

Until death ended our thirty-year friendship,
you gifted me each new poetic opus:
translations and studies of other poets,
your own verse and prose, mythic, philosophic.

You published a poem of mine in your journal
(we almost quarrelled about the French text).
It unlocked a door. I was nearing seventy;
in four years my first collection appeared.

Yours was a Gravesian sense of vocation:
the poet's art as existential quest.
It illumined you with a radiant certitude
others might envy. You gave it your life.

Dunstan Ward

LASTING

for Nick Carter

Beryl Graves gave me my copy ('He is the best')
when what's 'still the definitive study' arrived
at Deia: D. N. G. Carter's *Robert Graves:
The Lasting Poetic Achievement*, which proved
a constant guide over the ten years ahead
as Beryl and I found our way together,
volume by volume, through some twelve hundred poems.

I finally tracked down the writer in Trieste,
and lured you to Paris to launch my conference
with 'The Great War and Graves's Memory':
during the coach excursion to the Somme,
in the Bazentin cemetery where Graves was hit
(‘Old Gravy’s got it, all right’) you picked up
this spent cartridge, encrusted with mud and rust

Dunstan Ward

SHE SINGS THE POET
for Nick Carter

She sings the poet
beyond his grave
from a high stone stage
in sight of the sea.

She becomes one breath,
his and her own,
one voice that cries
love despite reason.

Words of his poem
incandesce in song,
descant above
Deià cicadas.

She improvises
on its seven lines
freely as flame.
She sets us alight.

Now she falls silent,
like those lost lovers
under the olives ...
We call out delight.
She smiles and bows.

Beverley Bie Brihac

WHEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN

They tethered the elephant on a plot
Of grass outside the municipal pool
Near the fairground
Where Roma on their travels stop.
I'd swum my lengths and towelled off
When I noticed her shy grey bulk
– But where hereabouts to hide? –
Rhubarb-leaf ears to fan breezes,
And rocking side to side uneasily
Like a visitor unsure of welcome.
I caught her eye and she, I felt, caught mine,
As if we had something to say
If only we could find the words.

Beverley Bie Brihac

HIGH LIFE

Unlucky the girl who never leaves home
In order to taste the joys of exile
In a country where her pupils line up on Sunday
And each girl braids the hair
Of the girl in front of her
Until they come full circle, and the last
Braids the hair of the first;

Unlucky the girl who never leaves home
To sleep under a tin roof that vultures dance on
In a compound banana trees shade
Where her pupils gather each washday to launder
Patterned pieces of cloth
And hang them to dry in the lion-faced sun
On the scarlet hibiscus that scent their dormitory;

Unlucky the girl who never leaves home
To live on a road on the way to the interior
Near a village whose medicine man
Proposes she come in for a consultation
For she, at twenty-two, is childless
And seems to have chosen a sky-blue scooter
And foreign travel over the delights of a family.

Beverley Bie Brihac

ÎLE DE FRANCE

Northern skies, their sumptuous cloud,
New storms building on last night's ash,
Suburbs grafted to a village
With a granite church, thrice-weekly market,
And Monument to the Dead
Whose names are still extant in these parts.
You are 30 km from Paris-Notre-Dame –
One of those neither-here-nor-there places.

I write this in the illusory peace
Of an evening in the not-quite-real world
Of hay rolls, combines and manure piles,
To mark our journey
Past pharmacies and time-hedged cottages
Whose shutters are still open,
Whose lamps begin to flicker on.

Beverley Bie Brihac

CHARTRES

Blonde Madonna, pleating harsh tulle
Into the hands of a dark-haired bridesmaid,
The bells peal

Telling you it's time
To stop tweaking your procession
There, under the arched tympanum

Whose stone saints dangle
Like soft prizes on the Wheel of Fortune
At the county fair. Tourists scramble

Up parapets. A quorum of boys
Cycling past with fishing poles
Stop to prod each other uneasily

As the improbable wooden doors creak
Inward, releasing a swell of organ chords,
Your signal to embark.

Poems Selected by Gregory Leadbetter

Gregory Leadbetter

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jonathan Davidson

IMPROMPTU PERFORMANCE

We stop by the barn's wide doorway,
which opens, darkly, to the day,
to hear a poem,
my friends and I.

Visions of fields and bees and wild boar
in the woods; the quiet roar
of a sea of leaves;
the harvest sky;

the bright red beehives hidden away
where the trees' green becomes grey;
the afternoon gloom;
all pass by

as we listen, by the barn's dark door,
piling high our 'come winter' store:
of words, of phrases;
of barley, rye.

Jonathan Davidson

BEGINNING AT THE END

for Lisa Peter

Beginning at the end, we closed the gate,
and no one saw us as we walked away;
the path ran on ahead, it would not wait.

A stream roared quietly across the slate,
its noisy silence cutting through the day.
Beginning at the end, we closed the gate.

A dipper said that we had come too late,
dark light refracting in the water's spray.
The path ran on ahead, it would not wait.

And new wood turned to ashes in the grate
of cold, late afternoon, a warm decay.
Beginning at the end, we closed the gate

and found, in walking, how to replicate
the heart's uncertain finding of its way.
The path ran on ahead, it would not wait.

Even the rooks were quiet, to demonstrate
that sometimes love is what we do not say.
Beginning at the end, we closed the gate.
The path ran on ahead, it would not wait.

Jonathan Davidson

TWO BOYS

Forgot the boy I once adored,
aged ten. An army family, his,
so very suddenly,
gone.

That first *forgetting* did not hurt
at all. I once, then never, spoke
of him, so no harm
done.

I saw him in my head five days
ago; a wet, cold spring, and yet,
improbably, the sun
shone
on his blond hair, on my tanned limbs
as we dangled from the swing
as it swung: dangerous
fun
for an afternoon. But *afterwards*
is as empty as the park was when
we'd gone. Two boys, then,
none.

Medha Singh

THE MEADOWS

The slow tension of your step I know
so well, now its absence in air, a tunnel
whose trebled whistle I fall inside
into rivers of lavender burning through
our days as we lie in the meadows, kissing.
God's feints that bruise the rising moon
come for me as you leave a while, my cheeks
lonesome and saline now that it's clear
the sun only eats so much darkness;
darkness, sick of itself, a mendicant
praying for light – I alone enter the cave
of your mouth, I alone coddle
its alien tongue with mine.
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.

Medha Singh

AFTER

You, whom I held under open heat
by a river that warmed and curved
in the distance, sloshed beneath
trains across that strange society.
Our dawns tapered under days turning
gelatinous within the deep grammar
of love. Today, you, for whom I heaved
through acres of poems. You, for whom
I peppered these quiet words across
the marmalade dusk, stand in a field
inside my solitude. There is a God
beyond plain logic moving her dark
hand over straits where the whales go
to calve. In shallows they find muster
for the buoyant new babe, blind
to the thousandfold tessellations
of the sea. The grass glitters clean,
daisies quiver in their windy groove
as you remember our time, a fable:
I couldn't gather you up, knowing
your nose, your tongue might meet
another shore. Snug in the air coiling
our concrete past, it now cracks
around the waists of women you
think you finally learnt how to love.
Think of me, lover, as a hand
in the pines from a purer time,
as error & ghost still coring
your chest: stubborn, unmoving.

Medha Singh

ZONE

Tornado, in the corner
of the car I held you, held
the unconsolated
chin, as my own. My cool
tongue, here.
Your mouth,
quiet & ear, wet.

– Slide

Segue –

– Zip

How we're thrown
from love
to love
never touched
the right way.



Stephen Romer

IN THE TIME OF PLAGUE

Breaking curfew – the first of our lifetime –
the village shuttered at the hinge of the year,
footfall amplified on the bitter track,

the moon rode high chill empty,
a zenith of judgement
over the bruised planet.

(Earlier, though, at dusk,
she was immense, yellow, companionable,
I could say *jocund*.)

But in the wee hours when we walked
she had withdrawn,
the great river also hid herself in frost.

Stephen Romer

OXFORD LOCKDOWN

The lights are low in the Standard,
the Harcourt is boarded up,
The Broad lies desolate

the Christmas tree forlorn;
at Brasenose the SCR
is a wilderness of powder blue

where I raise a solitary brandy
to the ghost of Christmas past
and the clock resounds

like my heart. Someone comes in,
startled to see me in the deeper shade
and asks, 'Has the clock struck?

– I'm here to check the mechanism ...'
and I reply
'Not in these 500 years'.

Stephen Romer

TRANSLATION CLASS

Peering out of the mullion window
I taste the privilege at its foaming edge:

Hawksmoor's sweet-drawn lines are tense
under the glacial blue
the Rad Cam glows or glowers.

Somewhere from All Souls within-the-curtilage,
a bell declines the hours.

My students have not heard of Arthur Rimbaud.

Stephen Romer

GUILTY AS CHARGED

'Moi, j'ai peur d'une idée qui écrase tout sur son passage. C'est beau et c'est terrible.' – Abel Quentin

My accuser has the face
of Bernini's angel
but I am not Teresa,
and she has the eyes
of Saint-Just.

Her slender hands
would straighten
once and for all
the crooked timber
of humanity

starting with this
noisome specimen, this
amanita phalloides
of privilege, who is
sweating fear. *Apologise!*

I do. Oh I do. Anything
to avoid those eyes...!
I thought of Chénier
hiding in the twilight
of Versailles, before

the tumbril came for him,
of Blanche de la Force
ripped –
in the teeth of history,
– *à bien d'autres encor!*

Stephen Romer

HORTUS CONCLUSUS

Close the gate on the garden,
as Gluck the blackbird sings us out;
these deep weeks he sang us in,
his podium the acacia then the cherry.
The monotone see-saw of the great tit
has quieted now he's mated
and with young ... but Gluck sings on
after we have gone.

Now in the flowery field
an English Gluck is singing
where buttercup and bugloss foam,
and when the mist starts wandering
he signals the fall of evening
with the trills of his alarm.

Stephen Romer

MY BOOKENDS

Sporadically, a name appears
In the bookshop's meagre poetry section,
Between Lord Rochester and Christina Rossetti.
But ephemeral, like malaria or the dengue,
– Unlike Christina and his Lordship's erection –
It vanishes again for years.

POETS IN THIS ISSUE

Beverley Bie Brahic is a Paris-based translator and poet. The author of four collections of poetry, including the 2012 Forward Prize finalist *White Sheets*, she has translated works by Charles Baudelaire, Yves Bonnefoy, Hélène Cixous, and Jacques Derrida. In 2009 her translation of *Francis Ponge* was a Popescu Prize finalist; in 2012 she won the prestigious Scott Moncrieff Prize for *Guillaume Apollinaire, The Little Auto*.

Jonathan Davidson is a poet, writer and literature activist. He lives in the English Midlands but works internationally. His poetry has been widely published and he has also written a memoir and criticism. His radio dramas and adaptations have been broadcast by BBC Radios 3 and 4. Much of his work is focused on how writing – especially poetry – is experienced by readers and listeners. His latest poetry collection is *A Commonplace* (Smith | Doorstop, 2020). www.jonathandavidson.net.

Stephen Romer published five collections of poetry, the first three with Oxford University Press: *Idols* (1986), *Plato's Ladder* (1992), and *Tribute* (1998); the next two, *Yellow Studio* (2008) and *Set Thy Love in Order: New and Selected Poems* (2017), with Carcanet Press. He is also the editor of the Faber anthology *Twentieth-Century French Poems* (2002). Poems of his were included in the Carcanet *Oxford Poets* anthology (2001), and a book of his selected poems in French translation, *Tribut*, appeared in 2007. A bilingual selection, *Le Fauteuil jaune*, was published by Le Bruit du temps in 2021. Romer was born in Hertfordshire and educated at Trinity Hall, Cambridge. He has lived in France since 1981, first in Paris, and since 1991 in the Loire Valley. He teaches at Tours University and Oxford.

Medha Singh is a poet, translator, and editor. She is the editor of *Berfrois*. Her first book, titled *Ecdysis* appeared in 2017 (Poetrywala); her second book, *I Will Bring My Time: Love*

Letters by S. H. Raza (Vadehra Art Gallery, 2020) is a collection of love letters she translated from the French of Indian modernist painter Sayed Haider Raza. Her work has appeared in numerous prestigious journals including *Almost Island*, *Indian Quarterly*, *The Bombay Literary Magazine*, and *Poetry at Sangam*, as well as anthologies, such as *Singing in the Dark* (Penguin, 2020), *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction* (Hachette, 2021), *Contemporary Indian Poetry by Younger Indians* (Sahitya Akademi, 2020), and *Best Indian Poetry 2018* (RLFPA editions). She is currently studying at the University of Edinburgh.

Joseph Thomas, as well as a poet, is a 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, where he is a Professor of English and Comparative Literature. In addition to co-editing *Prizing Children's Literature: The Cultural Politics of Children's Book Awards* (Routledge, 2016) and *All of a Kind: Remembering June Cummins* (Cats in the Basement, 2020), Thomas has published numerous essays, a handful of poems, and two books, *Poetry's Playground: The Culture of Contemporary American Children's Poetry* (Wayne State UP, 2007), the first book-length study of American children's poetry, and *Strong Measures* (Make Now, 2007), a collection of procedural and constraint-based poems. He can be found on Twitter @josephdsu.

Dunstan Ward has published two collections of poetry, *Beyond Puketapu* (2015) and *At This Distance* (2019), with a third forthcoming. He retired in 2007 as Professor of English at the University of London Institute in Paris, and now teaches at the Paris centre of Columbia University. With Beryl Graves he edited the three-volume Carcanet edition of Robert Graves's *Complete Poems* (1995-99), and the subsequent Penguin Classics edition (2003). He was president of the Robert Graves Society 2000-2010, and editor of the society's journal, and remains a member of its editorial board and associate editor of the Poetry Section.

OBITUARIES

Alice Hughes Kersnowski

Kathleen Maloney



Alice Hughes Kersnowski, Ph. D., passed away on Wednesday, March 23, 2022.

She was a member of the faculty of the English Literature and Language Department in the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, at St Mary's University for thirty-four years, 1988-2022. A well-respected national and international scholar, she was the author of multiple books and peer-reviewed articles. She made presentations at conferences, symposia, and colloquia in eleven countries, including Ireland, Spain, Finland, and Russia.

Dr K., as she was called by her students, held an MA and Ph. D. from University College Dublin (UCD), National University of Ireland, as well as a BA from Northwestern University. She served as a research fellow, symposium director and mentor at the Humanities Institute of Ireland, as well as a visiting scholar at Cambridge University, St Edmunds College, in the UK. She was the founder, mentor, and contributor to *Ellipsis ... A Journal for Undergraduate Research in the Humanities*, as well as the founder

of and mentor in *Senior Mentors: Matching Senior Scholars and Emeritus Scholars with Undergraduate Researchers*. Her publications included *Conversations with Edna O'Brien* and *Conversations with Henry Miller*, both from the University of Mississippi Press, as well as articles such as 'If it isn't this, What is it? Decommissioning and Trickster Tales in the Peace Process in Northern Ireland, 1998-2003' in the Trickster & Peace special issues of *Trickster's Way: Journal of Semiotics*. Dr K was a member of the editorial board of *The Robert Graves Review*, published by the Robert Graves Society.

Dr K. was pivotal in raising awareness about and creating a presence for Research in English and Cultural Studies on campus at St Mary's University where she was awarded the inaugural Senior Faculty Mentor Award for her work with more than 125 undergraduate and graduate students. She regularly mentored students in the McNair Scholars program and assisted many others in discovering the possibilities of graduate education in the United States and in Ireland. A dedicated archival researcher, Dr K. took students annually to the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin, to explore one of the world's richest archives in person and provided international archival opportunities for students to travel to and work with Trinity College Dublin's archives as well as UCD's. For her own research, Alice explored the archives of James Joyce, Edna O'Brien, and the Hunger Strike-era Prisoner's Library at Her Majesty's Prison Maze / Long Kesh Detention Center in Northern Ireland.

Dr K developed and taught over twenty-five different courses, including Irish literature, modernism, author and work: Joyce and O'Brien, women authors, research in English and cultural studies, writing assessment, senior English capstone, and world literature. Her areas of specialization included Irish literature, libraries and archives, modernism, and Edna O'Brien. She was dedicated to questions of peace at home and abroad as evidenced in her classes, as she highlighted the Marianist characteristics of educating for service justice and peace, as well as her work for the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE) through the United Nations

University and the University of Ulster, Derry / Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

Colleagues and students will miss her Friday salon-style afternoons, which she called ‘Open Door Fridays’, in the department where conversations with students, faculty, and passers-by ranged in topic, as questions were posed and contemplated. We will miss her impromptu tea parties. We will miss the *ceilidh* she threw each time she taught Irish literature. We will miss the way she always saw things we didn’t see and attempted to explain them to us as they appeared in her mind! We will miss the camaraderie, fun, and Alice’s real sense that reading literature mattered in the world.

Alice Kersnowski is survived by her husband of thirty-four years, Frank, her son Thomas, her stepdaughter Maud, and her granddaughters Amelia and Lydia. Memorial gifts can be made payable in memory of Dr K and mailed to: St Mary’s University, Advancement Services, One Camino Santa Maria, San Antonio, TX 78228-8544.

Anne Mounic

Dunstan Ward



Anne Mounic, the most prominent French figure in Robert Graves studies, died in February this year at the age of 66, after a long and courageous struggle with cancer. Formerly lecturer at the Université Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle, Anne Mounic was a gifted and prolific writer, producing numerous collections of poetry as well as short stories, novels, translations and critical works.

Robert Graves was a somewhat neglected figure in France at the time Anne Mounic embarked on her academic career. It was Bernard Brugière, professor of English literature at Paris III, who suggested him for her doctoral thesis, ‘Mythe et Littérature: Robert Graves’, which she defended in 1991.

During the next three decades, Anne Mounic made Robert Graves’s poetry much more widely available to French readers. She translated two selections of his poems: *Poèmes choisis* (Paris: Club des Poètes, 1994), and then a more extensive selection, *Poèmes* (Paris:

L'Harmattan, 2000). Subsequently, she selected and translated poems by Graves for the bilingual anthology of English poetry published in 2005 by Gallimard in their prestigious Pléiade collection. Graves also featured in her critical works on poetry, including the two-volume *Poésie et mythe* (L'Harmattan, 2000, 2001), *Poésie, mobilité de l'esprit* (L'Harmattan, 2003), and *Monde terrible où naître: La voix singulière face à l'Histoire* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2011).

Anne Mounic's major Gravesian study, *Counting the Beats: Robert Graves' Poetry of Unrest* (Amsterdam: Rodopi), appeared in 2012. In a review which is as illuminating on the poet himself as it is on his critic, Vincent O'Sullivan praises her as 'a marvellously astute commentator on Robert Graves'. The book builds on her distinctive and erudite papers at Robert Graves Society conferences and articles in the Society's journal *Gravesiana*, now the *Robert Graves Review* (<https://www.robertgravesreview.org/archive.php?tab=7>).

Anne Mounic lived at Chalifert, a village in the Marne forty km from Paris, where she and her husband, the artist Guy Braun, collaborated in their studio (Anne was also an artist and illustrated her own work), and published under the imprint Atelier GuyAnne.

In the summer of 1997 Anne Mounic was delighted to visit Robert Graves's house at Deià and to meet Beryl Graves, as was Guy Braun, who spent an idyllic childhood at the nearby village of Llucalcari and often saw the poet about on his walks.

Those who knew Anne Mounic will remember her luminous personality, her incisive intellect, and her quiet but determined character.

The Robert Graves Society offers its sincere sympathy to Guy Braun and to Anne Mounic's relatives.

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 (mjoseph@emeritus.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.

The Robert Graves Society, 2022