

Laura (Riding) Jackson and Robert Graves: The Question of Collaboration

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The question of the nature and extent of collaboration between Laura (Riding) Jackson and Robert Graves arises in the first place because, ever since the appearance of *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (1927) and *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928), the giant share of who-wrote-what has been awarded to Robert Graves; or the books have been misascribed as ‘by Robert Graves and Laura Riding’, or simply assigned to ‘Robert Graves’s, despite both works appearing as by ‘Laura Riding and Robert Graves’s, and despite the authors, either singly or together, protesting that the proper order of names is as it appears on the books’ dust-wrappers, spines and title-pages. In the Foreword to *A Pamphlet* they say:

At the beginning of a previous book, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, we carefully described it as a word-by-word collaboration. We did this because it was obvious to us that the vulgarity of a certain type of English reviewer would be encouraged by the combined circumstances that the first author was a woman and that the second was a man whose name was perhaps better known to him than that of the first; and because we were interested to see how far this vulgarity would persist in spite of our statement.

They list seven newspapers and journals which ‘succumbed’ to the ‘vulgarity’ of quoting the book as by ‘Robert Graves’ and conclude by insisting that the *A Pamphlet* is also a ‘word-by-word’ collaboration. But despite this declaration in 1928, as decade followed decade, right to the present day, both books are frequently cited as ‘by Robert Graves’, occasionally as ‘by Robert Graves and Laura Riding’, and often as ‘by Robert Graves (with Laura Riding)’. This last is a favourite, but in the Riding/Graves

case it is a particularly misleading, bibliographic convention, employed not only by bibliographers such as Higginson (1966, rev. 1987), but by the Oxford, Cambridge and other various ‘histories’ and ‘companions’ to modernist literature. Even when, on a number of occasions, such ‘scholarly’ productions have been approached by Laura (Riding) Jackson and others to amend their listings, they have by and large either ignored her request or, impertinently it may be thought by some, questioned it. Thus many of those listings may still be seen, even in their re-issues, as they were in their original state of publication, misinforming yet another generation of students and scholars and obfuscating the true balance of collaboration.

Between 1927 and about 1940 the blame for the reversing of the two names or for the disappearance altogether of the first-named (Laura Riding) lies squarely in the chauvinist camp of reviewers – joined, however, by some critics, notably William Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) and John Sparrow in *Sense and Poetry* (1934) – but after that the practice becomes much more insidious, with Graves scholars and biographers insistently implying that such work-collaborations primarily belonged to him. One typical quotation from Martin Seymour-Smith – Graves’s children’s tutor at one time and then his biographer – should suffice for the moment. It is from *Robert Graves: His Life and Work* (1982), to which later biographers are readily drawn.

The two collaborations [*A Survey* and *A Pamphlet*] with Graves are better written, and attracted much more general attention. Certainly Graves helped teach her to write more lucidly. He also served her as a source of information. Gottschalk [Riding’s former husband] met Graves on a visit to England in 1926 and gained the impression that he wrote most of the ‘collaborations’; the evidence, documentary, stylistic and otherwise, confirms this.¹

And this, a little further on:

[T] heir respective contributions are about equal, although the book is ultimately more his than hers, simply because he possessed a sound literary background whereas she did not. They agreed to call it a ‘word-by-word’ collaboration; and so it was.

The organization of the book’s argument, and the lucidity of its style, are his. Her own solitary prose efforts make this abundantly clear.²

And much more pushing on one side of the scales to the same effect. He fails to mention that the whole of the final chapter of *A Survey* is a revised and edited version of her essay ‘T. E. Hulme, The New Barbarism, & Gertrude Stein’ which appeared in her *Contemporaries and Snobs*, written at the same time as *A Survey* and published in 1928.³ He avoids it either because it is an embarrassment to his own argument – compare the ‘style’ of this chapter with earlier ones, for instance – or because he never read the whole of *Contemporaries and Snobs* – there are several indications that he may have read only a part of the first essay in the book. If one wishes to put just a small piece of evidence back in the scales to weigh against Mr Seymour-Smith, apart from the statement in *A Pamphlet*, there is a simple indication of Graves’s change of heart in matters poetic in his *Poems (1914–26)*, actually published in 1927. Having previously allowed his poems to be reprinted by anthologies over the years, in the Note to this volume he expresses his suspicion of anthologies. I have, he says, ‘given the benefit of the doubt to too many merely “anthology pieces.”’ This was written before *A Pamphlet* was published.

Seymour-Smith literarily murdered Laura Riding throughout his book on Robert Graves and was applauded by his reviewers. Later commentators, such as Richard Perceval Graves and Miranda Seymour, quarrel with him in minor matters, but accept his views on Laura Riding generally. They and other critics are at pains to point out certain earlier work of Graves, such as *On English Poetry* (1922), as indicating that he was responsible in the main for the collaborative books.

I think the reverse is true, that Laura Riding’s critical intellect is

to the fore in the composition of the two books. Graves was a poet of talent before he met Laura Riding, and there is no reason to doubt that they leant on each other in their collaborative prose work, but Graves's work before 1927 has nothing in common, in terms of the principles and 'style', with the two books in question. Just as his poetry changed after he met Laura Riding, as is widely acknowledged – and few will deny that he wrote some of his best poems during the years of their association, such as 'Warning To Children', 'In Broken Images', 'Flying Crooked', 'Lost Acres', 'It Was All Very Tidy', 'The Terraced Valley', etc. – so did his prose, as with *Mrs Fisher*, *Good-bye to All That*, and, of course, the Claudius novels among others. All these books, and a number of his others, contain acknowledgements to Laura Riding for her help: for example, in the Foreword to Graves's *Collected Poems* (1938), p. xxiv, and in the extraordinary 'Epilogue' to *Good-bye to All That*, both quoted below.

Critics tend, because of their training, to look backward to trace early seeds of ideas encountered in an author's subsequent work. It is fairly easy, certainly, to look back from *A Survey* and see that Graves had published four critical works (if *Lars Porsena* is included) by 1927, as well as several books and pamphlets of poems, whereas Laura Riding had published one critical essay (in America, in 1925) and two volumes of poetry. Similarly, it is natural that there are locatable passages in Graves's earlier critical books that touch on points later explored in *A Survey* (although few if any of the principles in *A Pamphlet*, it should be noted). After all, Graves is discussing poetry then, before 1926, as does *A Survey* later. But there the similarity ends. The methodical principles of *A Survey* have nothing in common with his earlier books. However, as that gently humorous Foreword to *A Pamphlet* anticipates, the 'vulgarity' of certain reviewers would dispose them toward discounting Laura Riding both as a woman and as because she was the lesser known of the two authors.

If critics and scholars look forward from *A Survey* instead of backward to Robert Graves's earlier criticism, a different picture emerges. If, for example, we take *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*

(the seeds of which are to be found throughout *A Survey*), we can see why the two authors notoriously became thought of by editors to be over-scrupulous about where they permitted their poems to be anthologised. The central point of *A Pamphlet* is its argument against the wholesale production of anthologies that encourage readers and poets alike to see poems as isolated entities, one-offs, whereas true poems are a continuum, a process of discovery and a revealing of meaning ('truth' as the authors determine it in *A Survey*) in the poet's life and world. To publish a poem singly in an anthology misrepresents that continuum, misrepresents the poet. So, for example, to publish a poem under the anthologistic category of, say, 'Nature', in which any number of Riding's and Graves's poems might fall, would present the poets as having an affirmative concern with nature, as being 'nature poets', loosely identifiable with any number of other poets, Wordsworth, for instance. But in the case of Riding and Graves, nothing could be further from the truth. Both wrote poems indicating the relative 'stupidity' of nature in contrast with the human. Far worse, anthologies encourage poets themselves into writing 'pretty' poems, simply for the sake of public appearance (this is at the heart of their devastating critique of Yeats's 'Innisfree'), instead of devoting themselves to the real business of poetry, the 'real business' being, as *A Survey* puts it, the 'making' of poetry.

A Pamphlet is a hard-argued case against poets allowing their work to appear indiscriminately in any anthology and against anthologies generally (there are exceptions) which, they say, bedevil the very idea of what true poetry is. Their principle in post-*Pamphlet* years was to permit their poems to appear in anthologies only when they could be assured, in agreement with the editors, that the selection of poems was theirs, and they could choose in which other poets' company they were to appear. This is the principle guiding their acceptance of Michael Roberts in his *Faber Book of Modern Verse*, where Roberts was cooperative, just as it is the principle behind their refusal to appear in Yeats' *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, where Yeats wasn't.

Robert Graves's earlier critical works, *On English Poetry* (1922),

The Meaning of Dreams (1924) and *Poetic Unreason* (1925), rely in great part on his interest in psychology following his meeting W. H. R. Rivers, also a friend of Siegfried Sassoon, at Craiglockhart, as described in *Good-bye To All That* (Chapter xxiv). Nothing in *A Survey* or *A Pamphlet* indicates the slightest interest in psychology. The word is mentioned only once or twice (in *A Survey*), and then somewhat disparagingly. Indeed, one could go through each of Graves's earlier books and argue that *A Survey* is written *against* his views then, rather than from them. His argument, for instance, in *On English Poetry*, extended in *Poetic Unreason*, that a poem is an escape from irresolvable emotional conflict and that it tricks the reader into agreement by use of shock tactics, of unexpected verbal manoeuvre, has no place in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, and in fact is argued against, as in the discussion of Ezra Pound's work (but also the work of the Sitwells and others). The main point of the Riding-Graves argument against Yeats's 'Innisfree' in *A Pamphlet* is that it is all smoke and mirrors – the mere 'wish-fulfilment mechanism of the ordinary fatigue-dream' which 'does not hold together' (p. 97).

If we look forward we can see that both poets' later views on poetry, literature and criticism are traceable from *A Survey*, and from their stance on anthologies in *A Pamphlet*, and are developed from the two books, not from any earlier work, with the possible exception of Laura Riding's first essay, *A Prophecy or a Plea* (*The Reviewer*, April 1925), the general principle of which, that a poet's job is to make something new, uncover new 'meaning', is consonant with the general principle of *A Survey*. Their complaints against many of the poets featured in *A Survey* (see the chapter 'The Making of Meaning', for example, especially their criticism of Ezra Pound) may be seen as understood, developed or extended in their subsequent books. Their individual prose work, however, went in different directions. Graves most notably turned his back on polite English society with the publication of *Good-bye to All That* and he locates the change of his direction in life in the advent of Laura Riding:

And yet the silence is false if it makes the book [*Good-bye to All That*] seem to have been written forward from where I was instead of backward from where you are. If the direction of the book were forward I should still be inside the body of it, arguing morals, literature, politics, suffering violent physical experiences, falling in and out of love [...] instead of here outside, writing this letter to you, as one also living against kind – indeed, rather against myself.

[...] How she [Nancy Nicholson] and I happening by seeming accident upon your teasing *Quids*, were drawn to write to you, who were in America, asking you to come to us. How, though you knew no more of us than we of you, and indeed less (for you knew me at a disadvantage, by my poems of the war), you forthwith came. [...]

That was the beginning of the end, and the end and after is yours. [...] ⁴

Graves here clearly discounts, as well as his own earlier work, the general course of his life's preoccupations up to 1926, when he and Riding first met. Meanwhile, Riding had published her *Contemporaries and Snobs*, where much of what is writ small in *A Survey* can be seen in detailed form, remembering that both books were written at the same time, and published within a few months of each other, as Graves reminds us in a letter of 1927 to Sassoon:

Laura's *Contemporaries and Snobs*, a very severe show-up of modernist criticism and snob-poets, comes out in a few weeks. So does our joint *Survey of Modernist Poetry*. The former is the better book, the latter the more courteous.⁵

Then followed *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (1928), in which she examines variously the nature of the poet's self and its reality (as opposed to what is generally and everywhere thought of as 'reality', that is, the surrounding world in all its various forms, a theme she takes up from the two books in question and 'A Prophecy or a Plea'). During the same period, Graves, busy on

other projects, published *Lars Porsena* (1927), *Lawrence and the Arabs* (1927), *Mrs Fisher* (1928), *The Shout* (1929) and *Good-bye to All That* (1929), none of which focus exclusively, if at all, on poetry. Both authors, of course, were busy writing and publishing poetry during this three-year period, as well as preparing the Seizin Press, but it was Riding who continued to drive home the principles of *A Survey* and *A Pamphlet*, not Graves, who did not return to poetic criticism until the *Epilogue* volumes began to appear in 1935, and then under the guidance of Riding, the editor.

That chronological publishing sequence at least suggests that Riding was the critical force, rather than Graves, behind the two books, a possible further indication being that after the break-up of the partnership in 1940, he soon permitted his poems to find their way into various anthologies whereas she stuck to the highly selective and collaborative principles of the *Pamphlet* for the rest of her life, despite some poems reprinted in anthologies either without her knowledge or against her wishes. As for Graves's later criticism, some two-thirds of his influential *The Common Asphodel* (1949) acknowledgedly consists of work originally written jointly with Riding or under her editorship. It can also be shown (space does not permit here) that the rest of Graves's later work, such as *The Crowning Privilege* (1955), *Oxford Addresses On Poetry* (1961) and *Mammon and the Black Goddess* (1965), drew heavily from the critical principles laid down in *A Survey*, particularly, for example, for the comments he makes on poets such as T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and W. H. Auden, where the arguments are not developed much, if at all, beyond the critical stance of *A Survey*. It might seem here that the exception is *The White Goddess* (1948), but this too has critical passages in line with *A Survey*, with regard, say, to the advantages of romantic over classical poets and much else. But as I suggest elsewhere, the formation of *The White Goddess* takes up yet another story within the story of the Riding-Graves partnership.⁶

It needs to be said, even at this late date, that neither critics nor biographers of Graves have truly read, nor have they understood, to any degree beyond the merely superficial, Riding's work,

whether poetry or prose. Seymour-Smith claimed to have done so, but he refers in moderately knowledgeable detail to only one of her essays, 'The Damned Thing', which seems to have taken his fancy: the piece is from her *Anarchism Is Not Enough* (1928, 2001), and Seymour-Smith reproduces its thesis in his book *Sex And Society* (1975). But beyond that his comments, however authoritative they may sound, are actually generalised and faulty. The same is true of earlier critics, such as Douglas Day among others. Both Seymour-Smith and R. P. Graves in their respective works are, beyond any doubt, anti-Riding, often virulently, both taking their lead from a vicious picturing of her presented by Thomas Matthews in 1977 in *Jacks Or Better (Under The Influence* in the London edition). Matthews had his own axe to grind, but in the representations of Laura (Riding) Jackson in this book it can clearly be discerned, if readers are alerted to the fact, that he, Matthews, was present at none of the crucial scenes he describes, although his adroit journalism tries to make it appear he was. In one such depicted scene, for example, told as though he was present as witness, he was, in fact, in New York. This, too, highly unpleasant as it is, is a story within the story, but not recountable here. In brief, critics and biographers have not done their job of even-handed investigation. Had they done justice to both authors they would not have been so quick to ascribe *A Survey* and *A Pamphlet* as falling within the intellectual sway of the Graves canon.

And this is the point after all. For all the intricate knowledge that has built up on the subject of Robert Graves, all the intimate biographical detail brought to light, as background to the work he produced between 1926 and 1940, (the 'Laura Riding years' as they have even been called), critics, scholars and academics in effect reject the evidence both from Graves's own published statements, and from any number of witnesses to his verbal statements, of the immense esteem in which he held Laura Riding. He, as she, was perfectly insistent on how the two books in question should be viewed as true collaborations, and he as she is equally insistent that the order of the names as they appear is the

true order. He is also candidly honest, in his books of the time, in his gratitude for the care she devoted to helping him with his work generally, in lending it her critical acumen. Add to this much other testimony of his to her personal grace and intellect and we begin to see that Graves's critics and biographers have done him no service at all in labelling him as obviously *stupid* when it came to the subject of Laura Riding. For *stupid* he must indeed have been if he was wrong about Laura Riding's role in his life for fourteen years and if they are right in dismissing her.

Two quotations from Graves should suffice to illustrate the point. The first is the one from the Foreword to his *Collected Poems* (1938):

In 1925 I first became acquainted with the poems and critical work of Laura Riding, and in 1926 with herself; and slowly began to revise my whole attitude to poetry. (The change begins half-way through Part II [of this volume].

The Foreword concludes:

I have to thank Laura Riding for her constructive and detailed criticism of my poems in various stages of composition – a generosity from which so many contemporary poets besides myself have benefited.

Graves's 'many' included not only friends such as James Reeves, Norman Cameron, Jacob Bronowski, and several other writers who contributed to *Epilogue*, but also relative 'outsiders' who engaged with them at different times, such as Ronald Bottrall, George Buchanan and Winifred Holmes.

The second Graves quotation is drawn from an exchange which scholars have either avoided for what it says or have been altogether ignorant of: the joint Riding-Graves essay 'From a Private Correspondence on Reality' in *Epilogue* III, 1937:

I am aware that your consciousness is of a final quality and that you are yet someone immediate and actual. How do I know this?

By a process of elimination, I should say: I have always had a blind but obstinate will to discover a consciousness of this quality and a realist's conviction that it was to be found in my time, and a painful frankness with myself that it was not my consciousness, and a physical intuition that it would be a woman's. And the process of elimination points to you, with a fantastic kind of logic. But there is nothing fantastic in my conviction that you think finally: because the recognition your thought invokes in me is not blind, but becomes clearer at every step.

[...] And so I have looked to you for the way out: mere negation, or belief, or speculation, I could have accomplished myself.⁷

With other acknowledgements through the intervening years, there is nothing ambiguous about either of these two quotations, as lucid and intelligent as they are sincere – ample testament of Robert Graves's respect for Laura Riding.

The problem was, and always has been, that academic patience with knotty problems is short-lived. This defect in critics, including scholars and academics as well as plain readers, was actually explored at length in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* in Chapter VI, 'The Making of the Poem'. For instance, in the context of a discussion on e. e. cummings, the authors refer to the 'sales-principle' of poetry, whereby the more readable or comprehensible a poem is, and the more it sells, the more it will be accepted as a 'good' poem:

The trouble is not with the reader or with the poem but with the government of criticism by the sales-principle, which must make an average standard of public taste allowing for the most backward reader of each of the three reading classes corresponding with the three different degrees of popular education. [...] [A]t the present time, regardless of the possible classification of a poem as *good* or *bad* according to the standards it suggests, it is enough for the critic to call a poem

obscure to relieve himself of the obligation of giving a real criticism of it.

Here is an example, in the first eighteen lines of what might be called a modernist poem, of the ‘obscurity’ which would probably cause it to be put aside by the critic after he had allowed it the customary two-minute reading (for if the poet has obeyed all the rules [as laid down by criticism], this is long enough to give a rough idea of what the poem is all about – and that is all that is generally wanted). Or if by chance the critic is ‘advanced’, serving such a limited public that his criticism is mere literary snobbery, he may pretend to understand it and dislike it equally, because he does not understand it; or, if he does, he may dislike it all the same because it is ‘too simple’ (a common charge against the ‘obscure’ poem when its obscurity is seen to have been only excessive clearness).

Now, the continual complaint against Laura (Riding) Jackson since her work first appeared in collected form (*The Close Chaplet*, 1926) is the charge of ‘obscurity’. The poem the authors proceed to use as an example of the ‘obscure’ poem is, rather mischievously, a previously unpublished one of hers, ‘The Rugged Black of Anger’, which is unassigned authorially. It begins,

The rugged black of anger
Has an uncertain smile-border.
The transition from one kind to another
May be love between neighbour and neighbour;
Or natural death; or discontinuance [...].

The authors defend the poem at length against the charge of ‘obscurity’, or the reaction of ‘blank incomprehension’ as it might be, and take their readers through the necessary work of expanding the poem to reveal its meaning, without damage to its integrity, using a technique which has similarities to their examination of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129, demonstrating, for

example, that both poems resist alteration or changes to their meanings. What is evident is that Laura Riding (but Robert Graves, too) faced that deadly charge of ‘obscurity’ as early as 1927 and dealt with it calmly and with equanimity. She could not have guessed perhaps that she would have to deal with it all the way to the last years of her life.

Had critics believed Graves as actually meaning what he said about Laura Riding’s importance to him – in her own right, as well as to him personally until long after their association ended (he informed Douglas Day in 1963 that she was the most underestimated poet of the twentieth century, albeit Professor Day chose to disagree) – they might have looked to her work for further elucidation of some of the difficult problems thrown up by *A Survey*.

Also elucidated by her later work would be the rationale of the two authors’ apparent isolation from and apparent standoffishness with their contemporaries, which was a complaint made by the Sitwells, Grigson and others, for example (complaints, too, about their strictures against a number of poets, and against anthologies, were widespread after the two books were published). Properly informed critics, and biographers as well, would perceive, for instance, that the fairly mild, at any rate well-mannered, critical stance in *A Survey* against T. S. Eliot (among others) is in effect a gloss on Laura Riding’s more outspoken commentary running through *Contemporaries and Snobs* – the book, it must be repeated, she was writing at the same time as working on *A Survey* – in which she berates Eliot for, among other things, formulating the doctrine that the creative act of writing a poem must occur simultaneously with the critical act, that is, that the poem must be written from the critical centre of consciousness and must not act as though it is independent.

While *A Survey* restrains itself to a mere pointing at Eliot’s ‘anti-Jewish’ stance in ‘Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar’ and the ‘disintegration’ of his poetry from ‘Prufrock’ to ‘The Waste Land’, in *Contemporaries and Snobs* Laura Riding goes into much more detail. For example, in the first of the three

sections of the book, 'Poetry & the Literary Universe' (pp. 108 – 109), she has this to say:

If, then, in spite of everything, literature was to go on at all, it had to be wilfully modern; it had to coincide with its age not by the accidents of personal authorship but by a calculated critical method. Aristotelianism brought up-to-date could therefore settle the problem of contemporary literature better than any new philosophical solution. [...]

In such an aesthetic the prevailing system of knowledge becomes the self-knowing Reason. Science is the modernized Self of reality (T. S. Eliot's thomistic God); not Baconian science, which was merely a human method of knowledge, but science as sophisticated substance superior to time and space qualifications, which are the marks of nonsensical, poetical facetiousness in humanity. Advanced contemporary poetry is, as may be verified, facetious, poetical and full of sophisticated knowledge: poetic snobbism is directed chiefly against the humanity, the infantilism, of the poetic mind. And poetry excuses itself by giving itself this ironic title: 'The Private Life of the Atom, A Dream Fantasy'. Poetry must, that is, be a joke at its own expense, a mature exercise in juvenility. It must no longer live in a time when

'Life went a-maying
With Nature, Hope and Poesy.'

It must rather approach that informed but idiotic bird-wittedness which is the chief charm of the nursery-rhyme. Mr. Eliot's *Waste Land* is the great twentieth-century nursery-rhyme.

[...] The poet renounces his citizenship in gross humanity and joins that dim social class which lives in the genteel retirement of a few superior critical journals.

As she points out earlier (p. 84):

Intelligence, the historical fallacy, is the philosophical means by

which the individual makes his literal time catch up with the figurative synthetic time of the totality of matter. Advanced contemporary poetry is thus breathless with scholarship – the *Waste Land*, a poem of four hundred and thirty-three lines, has one learned reference to every eight of these; but it is not breathless with intellect – there is no sign of intellect *per se* in the *Waste Land*. For as soon as an independent mental act needs to substantiate itself historically it ceases to be independent and it ceases to be intellect. It is only rather evasively intelligent.

Such passages as these are the background to the authors' stance towards Eliot throughout *A Survey*. Compare what Laura Riding says here, for example, with what the authors say about 'Burbank with a Baedeker'. Look also at the second section of *Contemporaries and Snobs* – the essay entitled 'The New Barbarism & Gertrude Stein', which first appeared in *transition*, in June 1927, and which the authors revised as the 'Conclusion' to *A Survey* – for a fuller explanation of some of the topics covered there.

The main principle driving *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* forward is to be found in the first five pages of *Contemporaries and Snobs* and is centred upon Laura Riding's thesis that the 'presence of excessive criticism in a time is a sign that it fears its own literature' (p. 16). To put it another way, for a poet to be acceptable in a world over-freighted by criticism he or she must pass the tests of criticism but must not act as a rugged individual, a wholly 'self-reliant' person, in whom each poem is a new, unknown thing, coming from nowhere except the poet's 'blind persistence' in making sense out of nonsense. Criticism enforces a 'Shame of the Person', which is the title of this first section.

At the very least, Graves scholars should be aware of this essay. So far, none has quoted it. This is not to argue that Laura Riding contributed more or less than Robert Graves: both brought to *A Survey* their own strengths in the 'word-by-word' collaboration. It is, however, to argue, that Laura Riding gave shape and form and extensive treatment to the principles underlying *A Survey*, and

they are principles not to be found in Graves's earlier books but which are at the heart of Riding's earlier 1925 essay, 'A Prophecy or a Plea'. And they are to inform her work and her life not just for the next fourteen years during her close working partnership with Robert Graves, but until her death. They were shared principles, too, a point Graves made repeatedly and insistently, as late as in this letter to a friend in Cambridge in January 1934:

I certainly remember that you and I talked about the Sonnets at Litherland, but only about the story of the Sonnets: it is simply untrue that I ever made such analysis of any particular Sonnet. I could not have done so, because it was Laura Riding who originated this exegetic method, i.e., chose the Sonnet not because I had discussed the Sonnet with you or anyone, but because we wanted a 'good' poem to work on that was at the same time a familiar one and presumably intelligible to a plain reader. We worked the whole thing out together at great labour and in pursuance of L.R.'s idea, in the Spring of 1926.⁸

Such mutually-embraced principles explain in large part why other firmly established poets of the time looked askance both at the Riding-Graves critical advocacies, and their working poetic practice, as threatening mainstream conventional poetic wisdoms. Those principles also account for much of what happened during their partnership and later. No one should doubt that each brought to that partnership her and his virtues of knowledge and understanding, and that both flourished happily, by both his and her account, for fourteen years. To diminish either one with regard to the other is a wilfully churlish disregard of the historical record as well as of the obvious affection and love they had for each other.

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NOTES

¹ Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves: His Life and Work* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p.138.

² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

³ Laura Riding, *Contemporaries and Snobs* (London: Cape, 1928) pp. 123–199.

⁴ *Good-bye to All That* (London: Cape, 1929), p. 444 (this ‘Dedicatory Epilogue’ is omitted in the 1957 edition and later).

⁵ *In Broken Images: Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1914–1946*, ed. by Paul O’Prey (London: Hutchinson, 1982), p. 176.

⁶ *Essays from Epilogue 1935–1937*, ed. by Mark Jacobs (Carcenet 2001), Introduction.

⁷ *Essays from Epilogue*, pp.163–64.

⁸ Private collection.