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O'Prey, Paul G

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THE POETRY OF ROBERT GRAVES
1914 - 1946

BY

PAUL O'PREY

A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD in the Faculty of Arts

Department of English June 1993

ABSTRACT

The thesis argues that between the years 1914 and 1946 Robert Graves developed a concept of poetry which was to a large extent defined by his ideological attitude to the society or 'age' in which he lived, and further argues that this had significant consequences for the poetry he wrote during the period. The thesis argues that Graves's ideas on poetry were particularly influenced by two major experiences: his active service in France during the First World War, and his thirteen year 'literary partnership' with the American poet Laura Riding. It considers the nature of these experiences, and analyses Graves's poetic response to them. The thesis attempts to show the importance of the post-war 'reconstruction' as one of the principal themes of his poetry, and in considering those poems contingent on the personal aesthetic established in *The White Goddess*, argues that this aesthetic was a response to, and rationalisation of, his experience in the war, his sense of disorientation and alienation in a post-war society he considered hostile to his view of poetry, and his relationship with Riding. The thesis shows that Graves's vision of poetry after the war was as a form of 'representative spokesmanship' for the age in which the poet lived, but that as a consequence of a sense of alienation and his acceptance of the views of Riding, he rejected this concept. Instead he sought an 'independence' from his age and attempted to redefine his personal identity in relation to his social environment. Poetry was no longer simply a means of responding to experience, but was itself 'the good experience', by which the individual poet sought 'self-illumination' and 'personal truth'. The use of poetry as a tool for seeking an awareness of the self led to a compositional technique in which ideas and phrases were worked through various drafts of 'secondary elaboration', and the thesis makes considerable use of Graves's worksheets to examine this process and gain an insight into the thinking behind an often cryptic poetry. Graves's emphasis on poetry as a form of 'spiritual autobiography' produced a body of work which by its nature requires the reader to engage with the biographical context of the poems if he or she is to understand their meaning fully and the thesis therefore draws on recently available material to establish this context.

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My first debt is a personal one to the subject of this thesis, for friendship and much more. I am also deeply indebted to Beryl Graves and Lucia Graves for their encouragement and support over many years, and to William Graves, his father's literary executor and the editor of his war poems. I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, Professor Charles Tomlinson of the University of Bristol, for his advice and encouragement. I also have to thank Dr P. MacDonald for his comments in the later stages. I am grateful to Professor Grahame Smith and his colleagues in the Department of English at the University of Stirling for inviting me to present several of the ideas in this thesis to a staff seminar at an early stage, and for a stimulating debate. A number of discussions over a period of time have been similarly helpful, and I would like to note in particular Martin Seymour-Smith, Richard Perceval Graves, Professor James McKinley of the University of Kansas, Professor Hugh Kenner, Jorge Luis Borges and John Mole, who have all helped me shape ideas at various stages. I am grateful to Professor Michael Irwin of the University of Kent for good advice, to Michael Parry, Secretary of the University of Bristol, for his continued support, and to Vivian Sanders for her hard work, expertise and enthusiasm in helping word-process the text.
I would like to thank A.P. Watt Ltd, for granting permission on behalf of the Trustees of the Robert Graves Copyright Trust to quote from Robert Graves's published and unpublished work, and The Poetry/Rare Books Collection, at the University of Buffalo, State University of New York, for permission to use and reproduce original manuscript material in their possession. I would also like to acknowledge the help of Robert J. Bertholf, Curator of the Poetry/Rare Books Collection at the University of Buffalo, and his assistant Michael Basinski. I am similarly grateful to Geoffrey Ford, Librarian of the University of Bristol, and his staff, particularly in the Inter-Library Loan Department. I am grateful to the British Academy for a Major State Studentship which enabled me to embark on the research.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife Pilar and my children, Llorenç and Mireia, for their encouragement, support and unfailing patience, and it is to them that the work is dedicated.

Author's Declaration

This thesis consists entirely of my own work.

Paul O'Prey

Abbreviations Used in the Notes:

GTAT29	Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That* (Cape, 1929).
GTAT57	Robert Graves, *Goodbye To All That* (Penguin, revised edition, 1957).
MS-S	Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves, His Life and Work*, (Hutchinson, 1982).
O'PREY-1	Ed. Paul O'Prey *In Broken Images, Selected Letters of Robert Graves, 1914-1946* (Hutchinson, 1982).
O'PREY-2	O'Prey, Paul, *Between Moon and Moon, Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1946-1972* (Hutchinson, 1984).
RPG-1	Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves, The Assault Heroic 1895-1926* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986).
RPG-2	Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves: The Years with Laura 1926-40* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990).
RG	Robert Graves

The place of publication is London unless otherwise indicated.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I argue that between the years 1914 and 1946 Robert Graves developed a concept of poetry which was to a large extent defined by his ideological attitude to the society or 'age' in which he lived, and I further argue that this had significant consequences for the poetry he wrote in the same period. I argue that Graves's ideas on poetry were particularly influenced by two major experiences: his active service in France during the First World War, and his thirteen year 'literary partnership'[1] with the American poet Laura Riding. I consider the nature of these experiences and analyse Graves's poetic response to them. In considering those poems contingent on the personal aesthetic established in *The White Goddess* and subsequent essays on 'muse poetry', I argue that this aesthetic was a response to, and a rationalisation of, his experience in the war, his sense of disorientation and alienation in post-war society which he believed was hostile to his view of poetry, and his relationship with Laura Riding. *The White Goddess*, written in 1946, marked the culmination of a long period of development, after which Graves's view of poetry did not change significantly. For this

reason I have chosen to end the thesis at this point, though I examine the consequences of his theory of 'muse poetry', as set out in *The White Goddess*, on the poetry written both at the time and subsequently.

The thesis argues that Graves's experience in the First World War is the most significant factor in his early poetry, and that despite an initially 'realistic' response, he developed a marked tendency to evasion as the war progressed, which continued to be a feature of his work after the war. When compiling his *Collected Poems 1938,* Graves omitted all his war poems[2], and this has led to these poems receiving relatively little critical attention to date, but I have found that in seeking to establish the significance of the war in his poetic development, a close study of the war juvenilia has been a necessary starting point. I argue that Graves's best poetry about the war was written retrospectively, at a time when he was suffering from 'neurasthenia', or what is now more commonly referred to as battle trauma. During the 1920s he experienced a feeling of disorientation common to survivors of the war, and struggled to reconstruct or 'refashion' a sense of personal and social identity, which he felt had been destroyed by the experience of trenches. The thesis attempts to demonstrate the importance of this reconstructive process as one of the principal themes of his post-war poetry.

In 1919 Graves began to formulate his ideas on the nature and purpose of poetry, and the role of the poet in society; these were published in *On English Poetry*, published in 1922. It would appear that as a poet he required such a formulation of ideas as a framework within which to function as a poet, for he revised them periodically in several prose studies published during the period[3], finally systematizing them into a 'metaphorical' or mythological framework[4]. In the years immediately after the war Graves expressed the view that the poet should strive to achieve a 'representative spokesmanship'[5] for the society in which he lived. However, a combination of the alienation he experienced on his return from France, and his subsequent acceptance of Riding's views on the necessary independence of the poet from his society, led to a rejection of this ideal and the formulation of a view of poetry as a fundamentally 'anti-social' activity in a 'non-poetic world'[6]. The poet then became 'something more than the mere servant and interpreter of civilization'[7], his aim instead being 'self-illumination'[8]. Poems were 'a sequence of the intenser moments' of the poet's 'spiritual autobiography'[9] and the primary task of the poet was, he told me in 1977, 'to know oneself'[10]. This led him to view the title of poet with an almost religious reverence[11], in the belief that it was an honour earned by living one's life according to a code of 'hyper-moral excellence'[12]. The poet's survival in a hostile world depended on the preservation of his 'poetic integrity', the definition of which was an idealised independence from commitment of any sort to the society in

which he lived, an 'avoidance' of the 'responsibilities of citizenship' in a 'non-poetic world':

> Poetic integrity. Of what does it consist? ... By non-poetic activities I mean those that prejudice the poet's independence of judgement...[13]

For both Graves and Riding poetry was a way of life, in which being a poet was contingent not simply on a correct way of writing but also on a correct way of behaving. For Riding, poems were 'incidents in the good existence'[14], while for Graves a poem was inextricably linked to the moral rectitude of its author:

> My own ineradicable view of poets ... is that one cannot separate them from their work: a flaw in character will always reveal itself as a flaw in poetic craft.[15]

Graves's ambition as a poet thus extended beyond the page. In the Foreword to *Collected Poems 1938*, he described his poems as stages in 'a struggle to be a poet in more than the literary sense'[16], in an 'age' which was 'intellectually and morally in perfect confusion'[17]. This thesis is an attempt to determine the nature of this 'struggle', and its relationship to the poet's personal response to the perceived confusion of the 'age'.

Graves's concept of poetry as 'spiritual autobiography' grew out of his own practice of using poetry in trying to come to terms

with his neurasthenia after the war. Writing a poem was, he wrote in 1922, 'the unforeseen fusion' in the poet's mind of 'contradictory emotional ideas'[18], or 'conflicting issues' in his subconscious[19]. Poetry became for him 'a form of psycho-therapy' which he believed would help 'heal' the mind of both the poet and his reader if he too were 'troubled' by a 'disturbing emotional crisis'[20]. This led to a compositional process which involved putting himself into a state of 'self-hypnosis'[21] or 'trance'[22], which he described on several occasions but most succinctly in the Arthur Dehon Little Memorial Lecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1963[23], when he explained how, for him, 'all poems... grow from a small verbal nucleus gradually assuming an individual rhythm and verse form':

> The writing is not 'automatic' as in a mediumistic trance when the pen travels without pause over the paper, but is broken by frequent critical amendments and excisions.[24]

He explained to his audience of mainly scientists that 'the poet is, on the whole, anti-authoritarian, agoraphobic and intuitive rather that intellectual'[25], which suggests he is describing his own case and generalising from it, and the account of the process of composition which followed this statement certainly refers to Graves's own practice, and is little changed from his 1922 description of the inspirational process in *On English Poetry*:

> Symptoms of the trance in which poetic composition occurs differ greatly from those of an induced mediumistic trance; though both seem directed by an external power. In a poetic trance, which happens no more predictably than a migraine or epileptic fit, this power is traditionally identified with the ancient Muse-goddess.[26]

The writing of a poem is thus a 'unifying of elements drawn from ... many different levels of consciousness'[27]. Following the main 'trance' the poet enters 'a lighter trance' during which he 'realises more fully the implication of his lines, and sharpens them'[28]. Given the 'truthfulness' of his original draft and 'the integrity of any secondary elaboration', the resultant poem will then 'hypnotize readers who are faced by similar problems into sharing the poet's emotional experience'[29].

This process of composition meant that Graves took each poem through several drafts, or secondary elaborations; in *Goodbye To All That* he notes that he never wrote a poem in less than three drafts, and usually needed about six or seven[30]. He retained these drafts and in the course of my study of his work I have examined many of them at Graves's house in Deià, where the worksheets of the later poems are kept, as well as those at the University of Buffalo, New York, which owns most of the earlier worksheets. In a letter to James Reeves in 1954, Graves spoke of his 'obsession about getting poems *right*' and refers to these worksheets: 'you see there how it all happens'[31]. I have taken

this hint and in discussing many of the poems have referred to the evolution of the text through its various stages of composition, wherever I found it provides a useful additional insight into the poem. I believe that this is the first full study of Graves's poetry to make use of the worksheets in this way.

Graves's emphasis on poetry as a form of 'spiritual autobiography' produced a body of work which by its nature requires the reader to engage with the biographical context of the poems if he or she is to understand their meaning fully. In analysing the poems I have therefore sought to establish this biographical context where relevant. I have also needed to make use of the biographical material available in considering Graves's self-consciously problematic 'place in the late Christian epoch of two World Wars and their horror-comic aftermaths'[32], which his poetry could 'not deny'[33] despite his deliberate avoidance of 'topical references'[34] and his later pursuit of 'independence'. Much of this biographical material has become available only relatively recently, with the publication of biographies by Martin Seymour-Smith[35], Richard Perceval Graves[36] and the two volumes of Graves's *Selected Letters* edited by myself[37].

This thesis has thus developed out of my earlier, biographical work on Graves, and also out of my editing of his *Selected Poems* in 1986[38]. Between 1926 and 1975 Graves published six volumes of *Collected Poems*. On each occasion he suppressed a large

number of earlier poems, a practice he explained in the Introduction to *Collected Poems 1938*:

> Briefly: I have suppressed whatever I felt misrepresented my poetic seriousness at the time when it was written. This may seem self-protective; but the publication of poems should not be an act of martyrdom to the pleasure that readers may derive from one's mistakes and digressions. The temptation to digress has always vexed me...[39]

In later collections Graves tended to favour the more recent poems at the expense of earlier ones. His suppression of war juvenilia was a relatively straightforward aesthetic judgement, but one suspects that personal factors play a part in, for example the suppression of poems to Laura Riding in *Collected Poems 1914-1947*, which omits 'The Taint', 'The Nape of the Neck', 'To Whom Else?' and 'To the Sovereign Muse'. Similarly, 'The Clipped Stater', a poem about T. E. Lawrence, was absent from the same volume, after Graves had radically altered his opinion of Lawrence's character.

As well as suppressing many of the early poems, Graves made revisions to many of those he retained. In the majority of instances revision was minimal and primarily stylistic or cosmetic, though each variation, no matter how minor, affects the possible readings of a poem. Occasionally more extensive revisions were made, so that for example there are not simply two

'versions' of 'The Pier-Glass', 'Pure Death', or 'Saint', but two significantly different poems with the same title. This poses a textual problem for the critic, and although for Graves the authoritative text of any poem would be his most recent revision of it, I have chosen for reasons of consistency to quote all poems in their original published form, except where stated, but where subsequent alterations are significant I have identified this and discussed the implication of later variations.

Modern perception of Graves's early work has thus to some extent been manipulated by these revisionist activities of his later self, and particularly so with regard to *Collected Poems 1975*, the last collection he made before his death. In a lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1965, Graves observed that just as it was an act of 'social politeness' to make one's will, 'it is equally polite for a poet to cut his canon down to a reasonable size'[40]. It was the poet's task to recognize those of his poems which were 'durable' and make his selection accordingly[41]. However, out of the six hundred and twenty-nine poems in *Collected Poems 1975*, four hundred and forty-seven were written in the last fifteen years of a prolific career that had spanned more than seventy. It was in an attempt to correct this imbalance that I proposed, in 1986, a re-evaluation of Graves's achievement by publishing an alternative selection which radically reduced the quantity of poems written after 1960 and reinstated many of the earlier poems that Graves himself had suppressed. The effect was to

redress the balance in favour of what might be called Graves's early middle period, 1926 - 1946. I believe that this is when he wrote his best poems, while after 1960 his work gradually declined and is generally of comparatively less merit. The publication of the *Selected Poems* in 1986 was part of a process of critical evaluation of Graves's work which was taken a significant step further in 1989 , with D.N.G. Carter's *Robert Graves, The Lasting Poetic Achievement*[42], the best study of Graves's work to date. Carter voiced his approval of my radical 'pruning' of the *Collected Poems*, adding that he himself would have pruned 'even further'[43], a view with which I myself, as a result of the present study, am now in agreement.

The thesis follows the chronological order of Graves's work, though in so far as it is concerned with establishing the influence of biographical context on Graves's thought and writing, it refers forward and backward in time as necessary. The seven chapters are divided into sections, which are listed in the Contents and at the start of each chapter. These sections are not intended to stand alone as isolated or definitive discussions of individual topics, but mark the progressional stages of an argument that connects all sections of the chapter. Facsimile reproductions of Graves's worksheets are included both in the body of text, where they form part of the discussion, and as illustrative material for reference in the appendices. Reference and bibliographical material is

presented in accordance with the guidelines set out in the Modern Humanities Research Association *Style Book*, 1991.

NOTES

1. RG, Foreword to *Collected Poems 1914-1947,* p. xi.

2. In RG *Collected Poems 1938* he referred to the 'digressive quality' of his war poems, p. xvii; in an article in the *Listener* in 1942, 'The Poets of World War II', he explained that in preparing *Collected Poems 1938* he found he 'could not conscientiously reprint any of [his] "war poems" - they were too obviously written in the war-poetry boom' (reprinted in RG, *The Common Asphodel,* p. 307).

3. *On English Poetry* (1922) was followed by *Poetic Unreason* (1925), *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry* (1925), *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (with Riding, 1927), and *The White Goddess* (1948).

4. In *The White Goddess*. In 'Postscript 1960' of the revised edition (Faber, 1961) RG wrote: 'I cannot make out why a belief in a Father-god's authorship of the universe, and its laws, seems any less unscientific than a belief in a Mother-goddess's inspiration of this artificial system. Granted the first metaphor, the second follows logically - if these *are* no better than metaphors... Since the source of poetry's creative power is not scientific intelligence, but inspiration - however this may be explained by scientists - one may surely attribute inspiration to the Lunar Muse, the oldest and most convenient European term for this source?' (p. 490).

5. RG, *Poetic Unreason,* p. 82.

6. RG, *The Crowning Privilege*, p. 122.

7. Riding and Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry,* p. 163.

8. RG, *Poetic Craft and Principle,* p. 176.

9. RG, Foreword to *Poems and Satires 1951,* p. viii.

10. The author, in discussion with Graves at Deià, Mallorca, August 1977.

11. In 1922 Graves wrote, 'One may think of Poetry as being like Religion, a modified descendant of primitive Magic' (*On English Poetry*, p. 19). Riding, according to Joyce Wexler in *Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth* (Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 1979) 'tried to make a religion of art... The poet's privileged position as the

revealer of truth was sacerdotal' (p. 26). Graves's view of the poet as the servant of the White Goddess is similar in its elevation of the 'muse poet' to the level of priest, drawing on the tradition of the 'ancient Celts' whose concept of the poet, according to Graves, was 'originally' as 'a priest and judge as well and whose person was sacrosanct... He was in Irish called *fili*, a seer; in Welsh *derwydd*, or oak-seer... Even kings came under his moral tutelage'. (*The White Goddess*, pp. 21-22).

12. O'PREY-1, letter to Basil Liddell Hart, 19th February 1940, p. 292.

13. RG, *The Crowning Privilege*, p. 122.

14. Riding, Preface to *Collected Poems 1938*, reprinted in *The Poems of Laura Riding* by Laura (Riding) Jackson (*sic*) (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1980) p. 413: 'To live in, by, for the reasons of, poems is to habituate oneself to the good existence'.

15. RG, *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 156.

16. RG, Foreword to *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xiii.

17. *Ibid*, p. xxiv.

18. RG, *On English Poetry*, p. 13.

19. *Ibid*, p. 26.

20. *Ibid*, p. 85.

21. *Ibid*, p. 27.

22. Described on many occasions as such by RG but most succinctly in *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, p. 43 (see below).

23. Published in *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, pp. 27-52.

24. *Ibid*, p. 43.

25. *Ibid*.

26. *Ibid*.

27. *Ibid*.

28. *Ibid*.

29. *Ibid*.

30. GTAT29, p. 389.

31. O'PREY-2, letter to James Reeves 3rd June 1954, p. 136. The emphasis is Graves's.

32. Foreword to RG, *Collected Poems 1965*.

33. *Ibid*.

34. *Ibid*.

35. Martin Seymour-Smith, *Robert Graves: His Life and Work* (Hutchinson, 1982).

36. Richard Perceval Graves, *Robert Graves: The Assault Heroic 1895-1926* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986) and *Robert Graves; The Years With Laura 1926-40* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991). Volume three of Richard Graves's three-part biography of his uncle is currently in preparation.

37. Paul O'Prey, ed., *In Broken Images, Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1914-1946* (Hutchinson, 1982) and *Between Moon and Moon, Selected Letters of Robert Graves 1946-1972* (Hutchinson, 1984).

38. Paul O'Prey ed., *Robert Graves Selected Poems* (Penguin, 1986).

39. Foreword to *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xiv.

40. RG, *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 37.

41. *Ibid*. See also the Foreword to RG, *Poems and Satires 1951*: 'I once suggested that no poet could hope to write more than twenty pages in his lifetime that were worth preserving; yet, though for conscience' sake I have suppressed hundreds of my own, both written and printed, *Collected Poems*, 1947, still contains an ambitiously large number, and here are more' (p. vii).

42. D.N.G. Carter, *Robert Graves: The Lasting Poetic Achievement* (Macmillan, 1989).

43. *Ibid*, p. 254.

ROBERT GRAVES : BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES 1895 - 1946

1895	Born in Wimbledon, London, to parents Amy (*neé* von Ranke) and Alfred Perceval Graves, minor Irish poet and Inspector of Schools.
1909 - 1914	Charterhouse School. Strongly influenced by George Mallory, one of the masters, who taught him to climb. Mallory introduced him to Edward Marsh, who commented on Graves's early poems and advised him to modernise his 'obsolete technique'. His association with Marsh led him by 1915 to consider himself a 'young Georgian'. In 1914 won a Classics Exhibition to St John's College, Oxford.
1914 - 1917	War Service:

At the outbreak of war in August 1914 volunteered for service and was given a commission in the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Trained at Wrexham and went to France for the first time in April 1915. Three tours on active service in the trenches, rising to the rank of Special Reserve Captain. Had a strong sense of regimental tradition and of 'comradeship' with his fellow soldiers, though he himself was widely unpopular among the officers. His German middle name and his possession of a copy of Nietzsche's poems led to suspicion among them that he was a German spy. Fought in the Battle of Loos and the Battle of the Somme, during which he was severely wounded in July 1916; reported officially died of wounds on his twenty-first birthday, a fact which was later to have great significance for him. Recovered sufficiently to return to France but was invalided home in February 1917. For the rest of the war was an Instructor of Cadets, mostly at Oxford.

War Poetry:

Graves's first collection of poems, *Over the Brazier*, published in 1916, included poems written at school and in France. Reviewers commented on the 'realism' of its war poems. *Goliath and David* privately published later that year, followed by *Fairies and Fusiliers* in 1917. Graves still influenced by Marsh, and was invited to contribute to Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* anthologies 1917-1922. Close friendship with Siegfried Sassoon, another officer in the RWF, and through Sassoon met and corresponded with Wilfred Owen.

1918	Married Nancy Nicholson in January, with whom he had four children. Ended the war suffering from neurasthenia, which was to last several years. Wrote many poems of escape and fantasy, but the better poetry was dependent on expressing his 'haunted' state of mind. This led him to fear that the power of writing poetry would disappear if he 'allowed' himself 'to get cured', for it seemed 'less important to be well than to be a good poet'. Aware that this was having a detrimental effect on his marriage, in 1920 decided to try to cure himself by a study of psychoanalysis.
1919	Went to St John's College, Oxford, to study English Literature but did not take degree. Met a number of poets, including Masefield, Blunden and Hardy. Made three friendships at Oxford which were to have an influence on his thinking and writing: T. E. Lawrence, Dr. W. H. R. Rivers, the psychologist, and Basanta Mallik, the Indian philosopher. *Treasure Box* (poems) published.
1920	*Country Sentiment* (poems) published.
1921	Left University and went to live in Islip, trying to make a living as a writer. Joined the Labour Party and became a parish councillor. *The Pier-Glass* (poems) published.
1922	*On English Poetry* published, a theoretical analysis of compositional technique, drawing on his private study of psychology and anthropology, and based on his own personal practice.
1923	*Whipperginny* (poems) and *The Feather-Bed* (poems) published.
1924	*Mock Beggar Hall* (poems) published.
1925	*Poetic Unreason* published, an analysis of the 'illogical element' in English poetry drawing on modern theories of psychology, for which he was awarded the degree of B.Litt at Oxford University. *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry* (criticism), *Welchman's Hose* (poems) and *The Marmosite's Miscellany* (poems) published.
1926	Through friendship with John Crowe Ransom became acquainted with the poems of the American poet Laura Riding (1901-1991). Invited Riding to Islip to stay indefinitely with him and his family. Appointed Professor of English Literature at Cairo University, but resigned after one term. Began writing partnership with Riding, and moved to Vienna with her, leaving his family in England, to work with her on a study of contemporary poetry.

1927	Returned to England, Riding and Graves sharing a flat together in London, though by now they had probably ceased to have sexual relations. Learned to print by hand and founded the Seizin Press with Riding. Publications: *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, 'a word by word collaboration' with Riding, *Lawrence and the Arabs*, a popular biography of T.E. Lawrence, and *Poems 1914-1926*, Graves's first collected poems.
1928	*A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, in collaboration with Laura Riding, published.
1929	Riding attempted suicide by jumping from the window of their fourth-floor flat. Graves jumped after her from the third floor (his motives are uncertain). Riding survived with severe injuries to her back. Graves and Nancy Nicholson separated. Graves wrote his autobiography in two months, after which he and Riding left England, Graves 'resolved never to make England [his] home again'. On the advice of Gertrude Stein they first rented a house in France and then moved to Deià, a small village on the north-west coast of Mallorca. They became the focus of a small group of writers and artists, which at various times included the poets James Reeves and Norman Cameron, the New Zealand film maker Len Lye, the writer Jacob Bronowski and the painter John Aldridge. Riding was the dominant 'authority' in this group and during these years in Deià Graves has been described as having been *in statu pupillari* to her. She gave critical advice to Graves on all his writings and made suggested amendments to a number of poems. With Riding continued to run the Seizin Press, publishing books by themselves as well as by Lye and Stein. Together with Riding, founded and edited *Epilogue*, a literary magazine, the second and third volumes edited by Riding alone. Volume four was published as *The World and Ourselves*, edited by Riding. *The Shout*, a semi-autobiographical short story, and *Goodbye To All That* published.
1930	Publications: *Ten Poems More* and *But It Still Goes On*, a collection of pieces including a 'Postscript to *Goodbye To All That*, and a play, 'But It Still Goes On', never performed in the commercial theatre. Graves's father published his own autobiography, *To Return To All That.*
1931	*To Whom Else?* (poems) and *Poems 1926-1930* published.
1932	*No Decency Left* published, a novel written in collaboration with Laura Riding, both using the pseudonym 'Barbara Rich'. The novel failed to be the popular success they had intended.
1933	Publications: *Poems 1930-1933* and *The Real David Copperfield*, an attempt to 'improve' Dickens's novel.

1934	*I, Claudius* and *Claudius the God* published.
1936	At the outbreak of the Spanish Civil war evacuated with Riding by British destroyer, and returned to England as 'refugees'. Without a settled base they moved first to London, then to Lugano in Switzerland, before moving back to London again. *Antigua, Penny, Puce* (novel) published.
1938	Moved to Brittany and worked with Riding on creating a 'Dictionary of Exact Meaning'. *Count Belisarius* (novel) and *Collected Poems* published.
1939	Moved to America with Riding, who became attached to and later married Schuyler Jackson. Riding and Graves separated in bitter acrimony. Riding 'renounced' poetry altogether and continued work on the dictionary with Jackson instead. Graves returned to England and lived with Beryl Pritchard, who was to become his second wife. They had four children together. Graves volunteered for active service at the outbreak of the Second World War but was turned down. Moved to Devon for the duration of the war and concentrated on writing.
1940	Publications: *No More Ghosts* (selected poems), *Sergeant Lamb of the Ninth* (novel) and *The Long Week-End* (with Alan Hodge) 'a social history of Great Britain 1918-1939'.
1941	*Proceed, Sergeant Lamb* (novel) published.
1942	*Work in Hand* (poems, with Norman Cameron and Alan Hodge) published.
1943	*Wife to Mr Milton* (novel) and *The Reader Over Your Shoulder: A Handbook for Writers of English Prose* (with Alan Hodge) published.
1944	*The Golden Fleece* (novel) published.
1946	At the end of the war Graves and his second family moved back to Deià, despite their dislike of Franco. Publications: *King Jesus* (novel) and *Poems 1938 - 1945*.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF POEMS

The following list establishes a working chronology, based on first publication in book form, of the 490 poems written by Graves from 1914 to 1947. In most instances, book publication followed within one to two years of a poem being written. A total of 19 individual volumes were published at regular intervals between 1916 and 1945, in addition to the cumulative editions of *Collected Poems* appearing in 1927, 1938, and 1947. Poems not published until many years after they were written appear in the year of writing, marked by an asterisk and followed by a note of their first publication.

The order of the poems listed under each year corresponds to the internal order of contents within individual books cited.

1915

* 'Through the Periscope' (published in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, 1988)

1916

Over the Brazier

'The Poet in the Nursery'
'The Dying Knight and the Fauns'
'Willaree'
'The Face of the Heavens'
'Jolly Yellow Moon'
'Youth and Folly'
'Ghost Music'

'Free Verse'
'In the Wilderness'
'Oh, and Oh!'
'Cherry Time'
'On Finding Myself a Soldier'
'The Shadow of Death'
'A Renascence'
'The Morning before the Battle'
'Limbo'
'The Trenches'
'The First Funeral'
'The Adventure'
'I Hate the Moon'
'Big Words'
'The Dead Fox Hunter'
'It's a Queer Time'
'1915'
'Over the Brazier'

* '"Farewell", the corporal cried...' (published in O'PREY-1)
* 'Died of Wounds' (published in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, 1988)
* 'The Savage Story of Cardonette' (published in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, 1988)

Goliath and David

'The Bough of Nonsense'
'Goliath and David'
'A Pinch of Salt'
'Babylon'
'Careers'
'The Lady Visitor in The Pauper Ward'
'The Last Post'
'A Dead Boche'
'Escape'
'Not Dead'

1917

Fairies and Fusiliers

'To an Ungentle Critic'
'The Legion'
'To Lucasta on Going to the Wars - for the Fourth Time'
'Two Fusiliers'
'To Robert Nichols'
'Dead Cow Farm'
'Mr. Philosopher'
'The Cruel Moon'
'Finland'
'The Caterpillar'
'Sorley's Weather'
'The Cottage'
'When I'm Killed'
'Letter to S.S. from Mametz Wood'
'Faun'
'The Spoilsport'
'The Shivering Beggar'
'Jonah'
'John Skelton'
'I Wonder What It Feels Like to be Drowned?'
'Double Red Daisies'
'I'd love to Be a Fairy's Child'
'The Next War'
'Strong Beer'
'Marigolds'
'Love and Black Magic'
'Smoke Rings'
'A Child's Nightmare'
'A Boy in Church'
'Corporal Stare'
'The Assault Heroic'

1918

* 'Armistice Day 1918' (published in *Beyond Giving*, 1969)
* 'The Patchwork Quilt' (published in O'PREY-1)

* 'Poor Fusilier' (published in O'PREY-1)
*? 'Trench Life' (published in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, 1988)
* 'Peace' (published in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, 1988)
*'Letter to S.S. From Bryn-y-Pin' (fragment published in O'PREY-1, full text in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, U.S. edition, New York, 1990)
*? 'Night March' (published in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, U.S. edition, New York, 1990)
*? 'The Survivor Comes Home' (published in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, U.S. edition, New York, 1990)
*? 'Poetic Injustice' (published in *Poems About War*, ed. W. Graves, U.S. edition, New York, 1990)

1919

Treasure Box

'Morning Phoenix'
'Catherine Henry'
'The Kiss'
'Lost Love'
'Fox's Dingle'
'The Dream'
'The Fiddler'
'The Gifts'
'Mirror, Mirror'

1920

Country Sentiment

'A Frosty Night'
'Song for Two Children'
'Dicky'
'The Three Drinkers'
'The Boy out of Church'
'After the Play'

'One Hard Look'
'True Johnny'
'The Voice of Beauty Drowned'
'The God Called Poetry'
'Rocky Acres'
'Advice to Lovers'
'Nebuchadnezzar's Fall'
'Give Us Rain'
'Allie'
'Loving Henry'
'Brittle Bones'
'Apples and Water'
'Manticor in Arabia'
'Outlaws'
'Balloo Loo for Jenny'
'Hawk and Buckle'
'The *Alice Jean*'
'The Cupboard'
'The Beacon'
'Pot and Kettle'
'Ghost Raddled'
'Neglectful Edward'
'The Well-Dressed Children'
'Thunder at Night'
'To E.M. - A Ballad of Nursery Rhyme'
'Jane'
'Vain and Careless'
'Nine o'Clock'
'The Picture Book'
'The Promised Lullaby'
[Retrospect:]
'Haunted'
'Retrospect: The Jests of the Clock'
'Here They Lie'
'Tom Taylor'
'Country at War'
'Sospan Fach'
'The Leveller'
'Hate Not, Fear Not'
'A Rhyme of Friends'
'A First Review'

1921

The Pier-Glass

'The Stake'
'The Troll's Nosegay'
'The Pier Glass'
'The Finding of Love'
'Reproach'
'The Magical Picture'
'Distant Smoke'
'Catherine Drury'
'Raising the Stone'
'The Treasure Box'
'The Gnat'
'The Patchwork Bonnet'
'Kit Logan and Lady Helen'
'Down'
'Saul of Tarsus'
'Storm: At the Farm Window'
'Black Horse Lane'
'Return'
'Incubus'
'The Hills of May'
'The Coronation Murder'

1923

Whipperginny

'Whipperginny'
'The Bedpost'
'A Lover Since Childhood'
'Song of Contrariety'
'The Ridge Top'
'Song in Winter'
'Unicorn and the White Doe'
'Sullen Moods'

'A False Report'
'Children of Darkness;
'Richard Roe and John Doe'
'The Dialecticians'
'The Lands of Whipperginny'
'The General Elliot'
'A Fight to the Death'
'Old Wives' Tales'
'Christmas Eve'
'The Snake and the Bull'
'The Red Ribbon Dream'
'In Procession'
'Henry and Mary'
'An English Wood'
'What Did I Dream?'
'Interlude: On Preserving a Poetic Formula'
'A History of Peace'
'The Rock Below'
'An Idyll of Old Age'
'The Lord Chamberlain Tells of a Famous Meeting'
'The Sewing Basket'
'Against Clock and Compasses'
'The Avengers'
'On the Poet's Birth'
'The Technique of Perfection'
'The Sibyl'
'A Crusader'
'A New Portrait of Judith of Bethulia'
'A Reversal'
'The Martyred Decadents: A Sympathetic Satire'
Epigrams:
    'On Christopher Marlowe'
    'A Village Conflict'
    'Dedicatory'
    'To R. Graves, Senior'
    'A Vehicle, to wit, a Bicycle'
    'Motto to a Book of Emblems'
'The Bowl and Rim'
'A Forced Music'
'The Turned of a Page'
'The Manifestation in the Temple'

'To Any Saint'
'A Dewdrop'
'A Valentine'

The Feather Bed

'Introductory letter (to John Crowe Ransom)'
'The Feather Bed: Prologue'
'The Feather Bed'
'Epilogue'

1924

Mock Beggar Hall

'Diplomatic Relations'
'Hemlock'
'Full Moon'
'Myrrhina'
'Twin Souls'
'The North Window'
'Attercop: The All-Wise Spider'
'Antinomies'
'Northward from Oxford'
'Witches'
'Antigonus: An Eclogue'
'Essay on Continuity'
'Interchange of Selves', by Basanta Mallik. The Editing and Prologue by Robert Graves
'Knowledge of God'
'Mock Beggar Hall: A Progression'
'The Rainbow and the Sceptic'

1925

Welchman's Hose

'Alice'
'Burrs and Brambles'
'From Our Ghostly Enemy'
'The Figure Head'
'Ovid in Defeat'
'Diversions':
I. 'To an Editor'
II. 'The Kingfisher's Return'
III. 'Love Without Hope'
IV. 'The Traveller's Curse after Misdirection' (from the Welsh)
V. 'Tilly Kettle'
'The College Debate'
'Sergeant-Major Money'
'A Letter from Wales'
'The Presence'
'The Clipped Stater'
'The Poetic State'
'Essay on Knowledge'
'At the Games'

The Marmosite's Miscellany

'To M. in India; with the Poem that Follows'
'The Marmosite's Miscellany'
'Tail Piece'
'Notes'
'The Moment of Weakness'

1927

Poems (1914-1926)
'In Spite'
'The Country Dance'
'The Rose and the Lily'

'Wild Strawberries'
'Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon'
'An Occasion'
'A Dedication of Three Hats'
'Ancestors'
'The Corner Knot'
'Virgil the Sorcerer'
'Pygmalion to Galatea'
'In Committee'
'A Letter to a Friend'
'This is Noon'
'The Time of Day'
'Blonde or Dark?'
'Boots and Bed'
'The Taint'
'Dunpling's Address to Gourmets'
'Sorrow'
'The Nape of the Neck'
'A Visit to Stratford'
'Pure Death'
'The Cool Web'

Poems (1914-1927)

'The Progress'
'Hell'
'The Dead Ship'
'O Jorrocks,I have promised'
'The Lost Acres'
'The Awkward Gardener'
'To a Charge of Didacticism'
'The Philatelist Royal'
'To be Less Philosophical'

1929

Poems 1929

'Between Dark and Dark'

'In No Direction'
'In Broken Images'
'To the Galleys'
'Warning to Children'
'A Dismissal'
'Guessing Black or White'
'Hector'
'Against Kind'
'Midway'
'Green Cabbage Wit'
'Castle'
'Railway Carriage'
'Back Door'
'Front Door'
'The Tow-Path
'Repair Shop'
'Landscape'
'Sandhills'
'Pavement'
'Return Fare'
'Single Fare'
'It Was All Very Tidy'
'A Sheet of Paper'

1930

Ten Poems More

'To the Reader over My Shoulder'
'History of the Word'
'Interruption'
'Survival of Love'
'The Age of Certainty'
'The Beast'
'Cracking the Nut against the Hammer'
'The Terraced Valley'
'Oak, Poplar, Pine'
'Act V Scene 5'
'Tail Piece: A Song to Make You and Me Laugh'

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1931

Poems 1926-1930

'Thief'
'Saint'
'Gardener'
'Ship Master'
'Lift-Boy'
'Brother'
'Cabbage Patch'
'Bay of Naples'
'Tap Room'
'Quayside'
'Flying Crooked'
'Reassurance to a Satyr'
'Synthetic Such'
'Anagrammagic'
'Midway'
'Dragons'
'O Love in Me'
'The Next Time'

To Whom Else

'Largesse to the Poor'
'The Felloe'd Year'
'On Time'
'On Rising Early'
'On Dwelling'
'Of Necessity'
'The Foolish Senses'
'Devilishly Disturbed'
'The Legs'
'Ogres and Pygmies'
'To Whom Else?'
'As It Were Poems':
I: 'In the legend of Reynard the Fox...'
II: 'A sick girl went from house to house...'

III: 'Dear Name, how shall I call you?'
'On Portents'

1933

Poems 1930-1933

'The Bards'
'Time'
'Ulysses'
'Down, Wanton, Down!'
'The Cell'
'The Succubus'
'Nobody'
'Danegeld'
'Trudge, Body'
'Music at Night'
'Without Pause'
'The Clock Men'
'The Commons of Sleep'
'What Times are These?'

1938

Collected Poems

'The Haunted House'
'Wanderings of Christmas'
'Mermaid,Dragon, Fiend'
'Angry Samson'
'Certain Mercies'
'The Cuirassiers of the Frontier'
'Love in Barrenness'
'Lust in Song'
'Vanity'
'Sick Love'
'Callow Captain'
'The Furious Voyage'
'The Stranger'

'The Smoky House'
'Green Loving'
'The Goblet'
'Fragment of a Lost Poem'
'Galatea and Pygmalion'
'The Devil's Advice to Story-Tellers'
'Sea Side'
'Lunch-Hour Blues'
'Wm. Brazier'
'Welsh Incident'
'Vision in the Repair Shop'
'Hotel Bed'
'Progressive Housing'
'Leda'
'The Florist Rose'
'Being Tall'
'At First Sight'
'Recalling War'
'X'
'A Former Attachment'
'Nature's Lineaments'
'The Philosopher'
'Parent to Children'
'To Challenge Delight'
'To Walk on Hills'
'To Bring the Dead to Life'
'To Evoke Posterity'
'The Poets'
'Defeat of the Rebels'
'The Grudge'
'Never Such Love'
'The Halfpenny'
'The Fallen Signpost'
'The China Plate'
'Idle Hands'
'The Laureate'
'A Jealous Man'
'The Cloak'
'The Halls of Bedlam'
'Or to Perish Before Day'
'A Country Mansion'

'The Eremites'
'The Advocates'
'Self-Praise'
'The Challenge'
'To the Sovereign Muse'
'The Ages of Oath'
'New Legends'
'Like Snow'
'The Climate of Thought'
'End of Play'
'The Fallen Tower of Siloam'
'The Great-Grandmother'
'No more Ghosts'
'Leaving the Rest Unsaid'

*'The Moon Ends in Nightmare' (*Malahat Review,* 1975)

1940

No More Ghosts

'A Love Story'
'The Thieves'
'To Sleep'

1944

The Golden Fleece

'She Tells Her Love while Half Asleep'
'Instructions to the Orphic Adept'
'Theseus and Ariadne'

1945

Poems 1938-1945

'Dawn Bombardment'
'The Worms of History'
'A Withering Herb'
'The Shot'
'Lollocks'
'Despite and Still'
'The Suicide in the Copse'
'Frightened Men'
'A Stranger at the Party'
'The Oath'
'Language of the Seasons'
'Mid-Winter Waking'
'The Rock at the Corner'
'The Beach'
'The Villagers and Death'
'The Door'
'Under the Pot'
'Through Nightmare'
'To Lucia at Birth'
'Death by Drums'
'Lament for Pasiphaë'
'The Twelve Days of Christmas'
'Cold Weather Proverb'
'To Juan at the Winter Solstice'
'Dream of a Climber'
'The Persian Version'
'The Weather of Olympus'
'Apollo of the Physiologists'
'The Oldest Soldier'
'Grotesques i-v'
'The Eugenist'
'1805'
'At the Savoy Chapel'

1948

Collected Poems (1914-1947)

'To Poets under Pisces'
'June'
'The Last Day of Leave (1916)'
'To Be Named a Bear'
'A Civil Servant'
'Gulls and Men'
'The Allansford Pursuit'
'The Alphabet Calendar of Amergin'
'The Siren's Welcome to Cronos'
'Dichetal do Chennaib'
'The Battle of the Trees'
'The Song of Blodeuwedd'
'Intercession in Late October'
'The Tetragrammaton'
'Nuns and Fish'
'The Destroyer'
'Return of the Goddess'

PART ONE

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

CHAPTER ONE

'THE ONLY PLACE FOR A GENTLEMAN':

EARLY RESPONSES TO THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR

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CHAPTER ONE

'THE ONLY PLACE FOR A GENTLEMAN': EARLY RESPONSES TO THE EXPERIENCE OF WAR

Early attitude to the war

The original, 1929 edition of Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That*[1] ends with an ironic litany of the autobiographical hero's paradoxical achievements in life to date:

> ...I seem to have done most of the story book things. I had, by the age of twenty-three, been born, initiated into a formal religion, travelled, learned to lie, loved unhappily, been married, gone to the war, taken life, procreated my kind, rejected formal religion, won fame and been killed... At the age of thirty-four... I have ridden on a locomotive, won a prize at the Olympic Games, become a member of the senior common-room at one Oxford college before becoming a member of the junior common-room at another, been examined by police on suspicion of attempted murder... had a statue of myself erected in a London park, and learned to tell the truth, nearly.[2]

Even the apparently genuine achievements in this self-mocking self-portrait, are touched by Gravesian irony. The medal he won, a bronze, was not for sport but for a poem, at the Cultural Olympics in 1924 ('the gold one went to Oliver Gogarty which shows the sort of bad joke it was'[3]). The statue in Battersea Park, by Eric Kennington, is of an anonymous 'intellectual soldier', for which Graves was simply the model. He was made a member of the senior common-room at Merton College, Oxford, despite not yet having matriculated at the University, when, as a Captain in the Royal Welch Fusiliers invalided home from France in 1917, he was instructing Canadian cadets there. Graves relished such irony and paradox, and it is entirely characteristic of the man who officially died of wounds on his twenty-first birthday, that he should have become, on Armistice Day 1985, the first poet to be commemorated on stone in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey while he was still alive[4]. The irony of this is double, for Graves is memorialised by the nation as one of its war poets, when he himself had for over fifty years persistently suppressed his war poems because they were not only embarrassingly immature and 'too obviously written in the war-poetry boom'[5], but because for Graves all war poetry was 'essentially' a form of 'higher journalism' and as such incompatible with what he called 'true poetry'[6].

When Britain declared war with Germany on August 4th, 1914, Graves, who had just left Charterhouse and was waiting to take

up a Classical Exhibition at St John's College, Oxford, responded immediately by presenting himself at the headquarters of his local regiment, the Royal Welch Fusiliers. He was promptly offered a commission there and began training at the regimental depot in Wrexham on August 11th. Graves's attitude to the war was, however, more ambiguous and less enthusiastic than this action might suggest. On October 25th of that year, he wrote to a schoolfriend, Cyril Hartmann:

> I can't imagine why I joined: not for sentiment or patriotism certainly & I am violating all my most cherished anti-war principles, but as D.N.B.[7] says, 'France is the only place for a gentleman now', principles or no principles.[8]

This letter shows that Graves's feelings about the war were complex and confused from the beginning, and were inextricably involved with his feelings about his upbringing and his family. Graves's mother had instilled in him from infancy a strong sense of social responsibility and morality[9], as well as pride in a distinguished ancestry, and he clearly felt pressure to live up to the personal and intellectual achievements of family heroes such as Leopold von Ranke, the German historian, and Charles Graves, the Bishop of Limerick[10]. However, despite winning an Exhibition to Oxford, Graves had left Charterhouse under a cloud, unpopular with the majority of boys and with his overriding ambition to write poetry disparaged by his headmaster, whose parting shot had been to warn Graves that his best friend

would always be the waste-paper basket[11]. Graves dreaded at this stage going on to Oxford, which seemed to him to offer only a more boisterous repetition of Charterhouse and a continuation of the misery he had felt there[12]. Joining the army thus offered a practical, temporary solution on several fronts, for it would not only defer his going up to Oxford, but it would also please his schoolmasters, schoolfriends and his family, being the right and honourable thing to do and thus proving, against certain vociferous doubts both at home and at school, that he was after all a sound English gentleman. His literary uncle, Charles Graves, who had previously entertained the most serious doubts about his poet nephew, even celebrated the event with a poem in *Punch*:

> And yet this freak ink-slinger,
> When England called for men,
> Straight ceased to be a singer
> And threw away his pen...[13]

Uncle Charles's joy was somewhat premature, however, given the fact that Graves took his pen with him to the war and found there ample subject for its use, much of it to the consternation of the literary and social establishment which he himself embodied.

Graves's reasons for going to the war were thus as much personal as patriotic, but life as a soldier went against his 'most cherished principles' and this inevitably resulted in a strong inner conflict. This conflict is at the centre of his war poems but was never truly

resolved, so that in his old age, when memories of the war returned to haunt him to the point of an obsession, he spoke repeatedly of his sense of guilt at having killed fellow human beings[14]. For the moment, however, in the summer of 1914 before being posted to France, Graves shared the view held by most Englishmen that his country had engaged in a just war, which would anyway be over by Christmas at the latest:

> It never occurred to me that newspapers and statesmen could lie. I forgot my pacifism - I was ready to believe the worst of the Germans. I was outraged to read of the cynical violation of Belgian neutrality. I wrote a poem promising vengeance for Louvrain.[15]

That particular poem has not survived, but this statement goes a long way to explain the difference in tone between Graves's youthful war poems written at the Front, and especially those written before 1917, and *Goodbye To All That*, written with the advantage of hindsight and mature reflection. Graves's attitude to the war in his prose is one of deep-felt rage, frustration and sadness, presented with an ironic detachment which leaves a lasting image of the war as tragic absurdity. On the other hand, his contemporary poems about the war lack any such detachment, remaining bound by the immediate personal experience. Graves wrote no patriotically idealistic poems (apart from, presumably, the lost poem promising vengeance for Louvrain), despite a strong schoolboy admiration for Rupert Brooke, reinforced by the

fact that while still at Charterhouse he was taken under the guiding wing of Sir Edward Marsh, the founding father of the Georgian movement and a close friend of Brooke's. In 1915 Marsh encouraged Graves to read Brooke as a model for modernising his 'obsolete technique'[16], but the influence was never more than a stylistic one. He did not see Brooke as a kindred spirit as he did Sorley[17], whose early criticism of Brooke's 'sentimental attitude' altered Graves's own opinion[18], so that he even expressed irritation with Brooke's 'prehistoric happiness' and 'feather-heartedness' to Marsh himself, noting that by 1918 Brooke's poems read 'impossibly'[19].

'Realism' of initial poetic response

Bernard Bergonzi has written that 'the literary records of the Great War can be seen as a series of attempts to evolve a response that would have some degree of adequacy to the unparalleled situation in which the writers were involved'[20]. The main characteristic of Graves's initial response to the war was to attempt a realistic presentation of his experiences for the benefit of his family and other non-combatant civilians back home in Britain. This was acknowledged by the anonymous reviewer in *The Times Literary Supplement* of *Over the Brazier*, Graves's first book published in May 1916. The reviewer found in these poems

'an arresting sense of the realities of trench life'[21], and in particular singled out 'It's a Queer Time':

> You're charging madly at 'em yelling "Fag!"
> When somehow something gives and your feet drag.
> You fall and strike your head; yet feel no pain
> And find... you're digging tunnels through the hay
> In the Big Barn, 'cause it's a rainy day.
> Oh springy hay, and lovely beams to climb!
> You're back in the old sailor suit again.
> It's a queer time.

This, and the two subsequent stanzas, possess, according to *The Times Literary Supplement*, a 'compelling... rawness' and 'a blunt familiarity'. Such a reaction seems wildly exaggerated in view of what was to come later from the pens of Sassoon, Owen and Graves himself, but it shows how comparatively original Graves was in his early 'realistic' response to the war. When Graves met Sassoon for the first time in billets at Lacon, in November 1915, he showed Sassoon an early draft of the *Over the Brazier* poems, which Sassoon found 'violent and repulsive'[22]. He told Graves that, in his opinion, 'the war should not be written about in such a realistic way'[23]. Sassoon's own poems at the time were a more literary and contrived response to suffering and death:

> Return to meet me, colours that were my joy,
> Not in the woeful crimson of men slain...[24]

There is a characteristic irony to the 'compelling rawness' and 'blunt realism' of 'It's a Queer Time', however, for a pencilled note in Graves's own copy of *Over the Brazier*[25], reveals that it was in fact written at the regimental Depot at Wrexham in early May 1915, before his first embarkation as part of the British Expeditionary Force to France. The poem cannot, therefore, have been inspired by personal experience of battle or of trenches; more likely is that it was an aggressive response to the news of Rupert Brooke's death on a hospital ship in the Aegean on April 23rd, 'killed by the arrows of jealous Musagetes in his own Greek islands', which 'truly grieved'[26] the young Graves, himself about to 'advance towards the brink'. Its realistic quality, meanwhile, limited as it was soon shown to be by actual experience, is presumably derived from the first-hand accounts of the war by returning veterans, which he must have listened to eagerly in the officer's mess at Wrexham.

'It's a Queer Time' contains the first sign of what was to become a characteristic Gravesian response to the war: the portrayal of horror through contrasting images of its alternatives, mainly bucolic fantasy and childhood nostalgia. Thus as the poet is wounded in the bayonet charge, he 'awakes' as in a dream to another reality, the safe idyll of childhood play: he falls in pain but lands not on the muddy battlefield, but on the 'springy hay' of the 'Big Barn', dressed not in khaki uniform but 'in the old sailor suit again'. This ironic interplay of contrasting images is used to

suggest the confusion of reality and unreality in the extreme situation of battle; going even further, Graves hints later in the poem, with 'I'm not well to-day', that this confusion could lead him ultimately to some form of mental disintegration, as indeed it did. This juxtaposition of childhood dream innocence and adult nightmare experience became for Graves a way of defining the unparalleled experience of battle trauma, as well as a form of retreat from reality itself.

Over the Brazier is divided into two parts: eleven poems 'Mostly written at Charterhouse, 1910-1914', and twelve poems 'Written before La Bassée, 1915'. In addition, 'The Poet in the Nursery' stands as a frontispiece, partly because it emphasises Graves's genuinely early sense of vocation as a poet, but also one assumes because it was clearly difficult to place in either of the sections, having been written at the war yet belonging in subject and tone with the exploration of childhood in the poems of the first part. The book's impact derives from this contrast of subject and tone between the two parts, as the carefree images of childhood are made nostalgic by the sudden anxieties and horrors of 'the pseudo-adult experience of soldiering'[27]. Graves originally intended to emphasise the contrast by calling the book '*C'est la guerre*', as he told Marsh in a letter from France:

> '*C'est la guerre*' has been consecrated by countless instances of French and Belgian fortitude in trouble and is perhaps the best-known expression in all the allied armies. It has a laugh

> and an apology in it and expresses just what I want, an explanation - an excuse almost - for the tremendous change in tone and method and standpoint which you must have noticed between the first and last parts of the verse-cycle, a hardening and coarsening and loss of music.[28]

Far from maintaining a sustained single reaction to the war, Graves's poems contain a number of contradictory emotional responses. At one extreme there is a recurrent, frank fear of death:

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

These lines from 'The Shadow of Death' open part two of the 'verse-cycle'. The preponderance of exclamation marks, the cockney rhyme of lines two and four, and the almost doggerel rhythm, undermine the genuineness of feeling to the extent of rendering it banal, but this poem tells us a great deal about Graves's state of mind at the time. According to a pencilled note in his own copy of *Over the Brazier*, 'The Shadow of Death' was written at 'La Bourse P-de-C [*Pas-de-Calais*], May 1915', making it his first war poem to be based on personal experience. The self-pity of this first stanza, which is even more unrestrained in the subsequent stanzas, is thus Graves's first response to the actual experience of trenches, which given the nature of that experience is neither surprising nor unreasonable: of five young

officers who went into the line together in May, Graves was the only survivor by October[29]. This frank register of fear replaces the almost light-hearted, philosophical acceptance of the war in 'It's a Queer Time', which as we have seen was based on an imagining of what warfare was like, rather than actual experience of battle. The change of tone between the two poems written in the same month is sudden and dramatic.

The fear of death combines with self-pity in a similar way at the close of 'I Hate the Moon' and 'Over the Brazier', but these occasional moments of pessimism far from dominate the book, the tone of which oscillates between the extremes of despair, and a youthful, boisterous resilience to all hardship. Edmund Gosse, writing in the *Edinburgh Review*, marvelled at the 'unmuffled gaiety' in the poems, and at Graves's 'elated vivacity which neither fire, nor pain, nor grief can long subdue'[30]. Graves was for the most part an irrepressible optimist in the first stages of the war, as his letters testify. His natural sanguinity and enthusiasm for life were daunted only temporarily by physical suffering or danger, as the following passage from a letter to Edward Marsh shows:

> About ten or twelve times as much stuff [ammunition] is handed round now than when I first came out, but I always enjoy trenches in a way, I must confess: I like feeling really frightened and if happiness consists in being miserable in a good cause, why then I'm doubly happy. England's is a good cause enough and the trenches are splendidly miserable: my

> company firing-line averages 30 yards from the Bosches [*sic*], the mud is chronic, there are few parts of the trench where one can stand upright without exposing oneself, and not a single canister-proof dug-out. If only it was blowing sleet and a gas attack was due tomorrow my cup of happiness would be full. We work all day and night and enjoy ourselves thoroughly, wading knee-deep through our native element and humming our popular tune...[31]

Had this letter been written by someone else, one would suspect an undercurrent of irony or sarcasm, but at this time Graves's writing was entirely without irony, while the 'unmuffled gaiety' Gosse noticed in the 1915 poems was still to be found in poems written after he had been at the war for over a year, as in 'Letter to S. S. From Mametz Wood' (later retitled 'Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon'):

> I never dreamed we'd meet that day
> In our old haunts down Fricourt way,
> Plotting such marvellous journeys there
> For jolly old "Après-la-guerre".

'*Après-la-guerre*' was a constant theme in these early poems, as Graves endured the 'queer time' of the present only by imagining a 'golden-houred' future. In 'Over the Brazier', the poem which finally gave the book its title, Graves described the idyllic life he promised himself after the war:

> I'd thought: 'A cottage in the hills,
> North Wales, a cottage full of books,

Pictures and brass and cosy nooks
And comfortable broad window-sills,
Flowers in the garden, walls all white,
I'd live there peacefully, and dream and write.

This description of a bucolic withdrawal from the world, written in the summer of 1915, is the first intimation that Graves was soon to move towards the direction of Georgianism, becoming a post-war writer of nostalgic 'country sentiment' and contributing to three of the five *Georgian Poetry* anthologies edited by Marsh. By the end of the war Graves was not writing savage anti-war propaganda like Sassoon, or deeply felt poems of horror and suffering like Owen, but gentle poems of ideal love in a pastoral setting. For Graves the pastoral came to embody everything that the war was not, and he used it, as in 'Over the Brazier', not only as a dream of the post-war which enabled him to 'endure to the end'[32] but as an emphatic contrast of idealised harmony, beauty and peace, to portray and define the misery of war. 'Over the Brazier' dismisses the pastoral '*après-la-guerre*' dream by remembering the similar dreams of his comrades Mac and Willie, which they had shared with the poet as they sat talking around the brazier:

So then we built and stocked for Willie
A log-hut, and for Mac a calm
Rockabye cradle on a palm -
Idyllic dwellings - but this silly
Mad War has now wrecked both, and what
Better hopes has my little cottage got?

This pessimism was again short-lived, however, for in May of the following year Graves actually bought such a cottage in North Wales and repeated the dream of going there after the war in 'Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon' (July 1916).

Homosexual love poems: '1915' and 'Not Dead'

Like all soldiers in the trenches, Graves lived close to nature during his service at the Front, more often than not 'knee deep in our native element', with long periods of enforced idleness in which to contemplate the natural world around him. '1915', written at Le Havre shortly after 'Over the Brazier', opens with an account of this contact with nature:

> I've watched the Seasons passing slow, so slow,
> In the fields between La Bassée and Béthune;
> Primroses and the first warm day of Spring,
> Red poppy floods of June,
> August, and yellowing Autumn, so
> To Winter nights knee-deep in mud or snow...

The rhythm of the first line, the cadence falling as it were prematurely on 'passing slow' to be then retrieved and let fall again with the repetition of 'slow', suggests the boredom as well as the solace within this enforced encounter with nature, and is evidence of a greater control and sureness of touch in Graves's

verse structure. However, the metre changes abruptly in the shortening of lines four and five, and with the clumsy enjambement of line five's 'so / To Winter', the verse moves precipitately from a gentle, Keatsian observation of the mellowing year into direct contact with a suddenly less than benign nature; the strong image of nights spent 'knee-deep in mud or snow', in which the poet is not only surrounded by a hostile environment but is physically immersed in it and trapped within it, is, however, weakened by a lack of preparation in the preceding lines. In the following line, the poem again changes suddenly from a contemplation of nature into a love poem:

> And you've been everything,
>
> Dear, you've been everything that I most lack
> In these soul-deadening trenches - pictures, books,
> Music, the quiet of an English wood,
> Beautiful comrade-looks,
> The narrow, bouldered mountain-track,
> The broad, full-bosomed ocean, green and black,
> And Peace, and all that's good.

'1915' is a significant poem in Graves's early development, for it is not only the most accomplished poem in *Over the Brazier*, but it is the first recognisably 'Gravesian' poem in its conflation of love, goodness and nature which he was to pursue as an ideal through his mature lyrics. '1915' is in fact Graves's first published love poem, but it is notably different from his later love

poetry because of the fact that it is a declaration of homosexual love. We know from Graves's letters and from his autobiography that he still maintained at this time a strong emotional attachment to his schoolboy friend, George Harcourt Johnstone, whom he refers to in *Goodbye To All That* by the pseudonym 'Dick'. Johnstone was still too young for armed service and was back in England, but his letters did a great deal to sustain Graves's morale in trenches at this time:

> Dick's letters were my greatest stand-by all these months when I was feeling low; he wrote every week, mostly about poetry. They were something solid and clean to set off against the impermanence of trench life and the uncleanness of sex life in billets.[33]

The idealised nature of love in '1915' is consistent with a relationship based almost solely on correspondence. This, and the fact that the love is homosexual, explains the poem's emphasis on the platonic sharing of common experiences and interests, whether they are 'pictures, books, music', or the mud and snow of La Bassée. Graves had recently been made to suppress a poem, 'Francis', by his father who thought it 'immoral'[34], and was at pains not to risk further strictures about a relationship he himself considered 'solid and clean'. There is reference to beauty in '1915', but Graves attempts to deflect any suspicion of eroticism by emphasising that the beauty is in the exchange of looks between 'comrades' rather than lovers, and is therefore in

the tenderness of the platonic bond between them, which enables him to endure the experience of 'soul-deadening trenches' by sustaining the values of nature, human culture, 'peace, and all that's good', which are otherwise destroyed by war. On one level, the poem is a justification of what Graves believed to be 'pure' homosexual friendship, and which he had defended at home and at school as being 'essentially moral' and as having no erotic undertones[35].

'1915' is a direct precursor to 'Not Dead', written about another close friend with whom Graves enjoyed an intimate but 'pure' relationship, David Thomas, a second lieutenant in the third battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers; in *Goodbye To All That* Graves comments that he was 'a simple, gentle fellow and fond of reading', and that 'Siegfried, he and I were together a lot'[36]. Thomas was killed by a stray bullet in March, 1916, and in *Goodbye To All That* Graves recalls that he 'felt David's death worse than any other since [he] had been in France', and that it made him feel 'empty and lost'. The impact of Thomas's death on Graves was indeed profound, and was the subject of two of the best poems he wrote during this period, 'Not Dead' and 'Goliath and David'. 'Not Dead' continues the conceit of the beloved as an embodiment of benign nature and goodness as in '1915', but with the clear difference that here the absence of the beloved is no longer a source of comfort, the poet's link with the normal, peaceful world of 'pictures, books, music... and all that's good';

on the contrary, the beloved's absence now is part of the painful actuality, caused by the common enemy death:

> Walking through trees to cool my heat and pain,
> I know that David's with me here again.
> All that is simple, happy, strong, he is.
> Caressingly I stroke
> Rough bark of the friendly oak.
> A brook goes bubbling by: the voice is his.
> Turf burns with pleasant smoke;
> I laugh at chaffinch and at primroses.
> All that is simple, happy, strong he is.
> Over the whole world in a little while
> Breaks his slow smile.

In '1915' the poet is immersed 'knee-deep' in a hostile nature; now, however, the presence of nature in its most benign mode is a curing balm for the oppressed spirit, reuniting the poet with his beloved, who through death has been absorbed by and become fully part of nature. Because of Thomas's 'simple, gentle' character, this is the aspect of nature he embodies: not the harsh, hostile, winter mud and frost they had endured together in the war, but the cheerful, hopeful spring of flowers and birdsong which they dreamed of sharing after the war.

Both '1915' and 'Not Dead' show Graves turning away from a direct confrontation of the war in his poetry to a contemplation of the 'solid and clean', which he could 'set against the impermanence of trench life'; all through the poems of *Over the*

Brazier he clings to the alternatives to war: childhood nostalgia, nature, love, and of course poetry itself. '1915' and 'Not Dead' in particular set the pattern for those later love lyrics which pursue the romantic ideal of the poet and his 'muse' in a mutually self-sufficient separation from the world of other men, in harmony with a benign nature. In both poems there is no doubt that the poet and his beloved are alone. In '1915' there is no mention of any of the other 'comrades' cramped together in the crowded trenches; there are no human figures in the carefully drawn landscape, apart from the imagined figure of the absent beloved, who is 'everything' to the poet and made real to the poet by the nature he represents. In 'Not Dead' they are again alone in an isolated world of benign nature which they have made their own. It is a scenario repeated in 'Mid-Winter Waking', written over twenty-five years later, in which the consummation of love is expressed as an achievement of the ideal of survival with the beloved through a hostile winter to share with her (and with her alone) a benign spring:

> Be witness that on waking, this mid-winter,
> I found her hand in mine laid closely
> Who shall watch out the Spring with me.
> We stared in silence all around us
> But found no winter anywhere to see.

'A Dead Boche'

Over the Brazier had been published in May of 1916, but before the end of that year Graves had a second book, *Goliath and David*, privately printed at the Chiswick Press. The poems in this second collection show a maturation of style and manner, and an increased intensity of emotion. 'Not Dead' is chronologically the first of these poems, and although in *Goodbye To All That* Graves claims that the death of David Thomas did not make him 'angry' in the way it did Sassoon, the next poem he wrote is his most consciously 'angry' of the entire war, 'A Dead Boche'. On patrol in Mametz Wood during the summer of 1916, Graves had come across the 'bloated and stinking' corpse of a German soldier, propped against a tree[37]. The image struck him as summing up the ugliness and inhumanity of the war and he used it to hector the flag-waving public back in England, whom he believed, like most English soldiers then in France, to be naive, misguided and misled by the politicians and the press. Graves's clearly stated political intention at the start of this poem is to present to those back in England, who 'only hear of blood and fame', an image which is so strong and repulsive that it will act as a 'certain cure' for any 'lust of blood' they may feel. For Graves, the pride and patriotism expressed by many civilians, and particularly members of his own immediate family, were founded on an ignorance about the true nature of the experiences and conditions endured by the troops engaged in the fighting[38]. That the poet himself

may be partly to blame for this misconception is acknowledged by the poem being addressed to 'you who'd read my songs of War', the poems of *Over the Brazier* which he now felt had contributed to a distorted picture of the war. The blunt, graphic, visual description of the more disgusting details of the corpse's decay are listed with bitter relish, and to the polite poetry-reading public of 1916, not yet educated by Sassoon, it must have seemed strong medicine indeed. A draft typescript of the poem exists[39] which contains eight lines omitted in publication, here indicated in italics:

> To you who'd read my songs of War,
> And only hear of love* and fame, [*'blood' in published version]
> I'll say (you've heard it said before)
> "War's Hell", and if you doubt the same,
> *By Heaven, I'll shock you, so you must*
> *Remember with my sick disgust.*
>
> *Here, by Mametz, I'll let you see*
> *What I saw in the woods to-day:*
> *There was no twig on any tree*
> *Unbroken in the whole array:*
> *Over the battered earth was spread*
> *The slaughter of a thousand dead.*
>
> There, propped against a shattered trunk,
> In a great mess of things unclean,
> Sat a dead Bosche: he scowled and stunk
> With clothes and face a sodden green,
> Big bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
> Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

This draft serves to make the political strategy of the poet plain, while the angry tone of these lines displays an even more aggressive attitude to a civilian readership than is evident in the published version. The mildly profane asseveration, 'By Heaven', followed by the overt determination of 'I'll shock you', threatens and disturbs an assumed complacency in the reader's mind, while the accented, emphatic 'must' demands from him or her a more than merely literary response. The alliteration and internal half-rhyme of 'shock' and 'sick', and the onomatopoeia of 'sick disgust', suggest the poet's immediate physical reaction to the image, and it is the urgency and immediacy of this reaction which he attempts to force the reader to share. In the two subsequent lines of the draft, also omitted in the published version, the reader is allowed to participate in the poet's witnessing of the scene: 'I'll let you see / What I saw in the woods today'. There then follow four unpublished lines establishing a wider context for the corpse, which is not an isolated horror as in the published poem, but a typical local detail in a desolate war-torn landscape:

> Over the battered earth was spread
> The slaughter of a thousand dead.

In the climax of the poem the stinking, bloated corpse becomes a vivid presence, as the poet lingers on sensory detail designed to ensure that the image becomes as firmly engraved in the reader's memory as it is in his own:

> ...he scowled and stunk
> With clothes and face a sodden green,
> Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
> Dribbling black blood from nose and beard.

The asyndetic accumulation of detail in the final two lines drives home the relentless message of the poet, whose dogmatic intent is made transparent in the manuscript draft, and Graves's concern for, and expertise in, manipulating the verbal texture of the poem as a means of affecting and controlling the emotions of the reader[40] are apparent here, for the poem depends heavily for its effect on the texture of sounds it creates. In these final lines the poet relies on alliteration and half-rhyme for a cacophonous presentation of unpleasant images. The repetition of accented gutturals ('scowled', 'stunk', 'spectacled', 'crop-haired', 'black') and the dense patterning of alternately labial and dental consonants, deliver the required sharp, urgent quality of image necessary if, as the poet had threatened, the reader 'must remember' and be 'disgusted' by what the poet demands he looks at, with the unspoken implication that he himself has been forced to look at it on behalf of the civilian readership he intends. The patterning of consonants was a technique Graves derived from his readings of Welsh poetry, whose *cynghanedd* he had tried to imitate in some of his earliest verses[41]. Finding the strictly matching consonantal sequences of Welsh bardic poetry 'too crabbed' for English, however, he 'modified them to cross-

alliteration',[42] and here a rather loose but identifiable sequence is established, with closely packed labial 'p' and 'b' sounds succeeded by the harsh, stop consonant 'd', usually separated by the palatal 'l': 'big-bellied', 'spectacled', 'crop-haired', 'blood', 'beard'. The effect of this, combined with the guttural alliteration, is to produce a striking network of sounds which give full force to the poet's mixed feelings of anger and disgust.

The typescript is dated July 14th, 1916, and given the fact that Graves was then in trenches and unlikely to have access to a typewriter, the date probably refers to composition rather than typing. However, as a date of composition this contradicts the account of seeing the corpse in *Goodbye To All That*, which is specific in detailing the movements of the Battalion at this time. Graves states that they only reached the area of Mametz Wood on July 15th, after a long march from Buire[43], and it was either on that day or during the next one or two days that he encountered the corpse. It is likely that *Goodbye To All That* is the inaccurate source here, for the last eight lines of 'A Dead Boche' were originally included as an appendix to the verse 'Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon', which is also dated July 13th in *Poems 1914-1926*[44], and the dating of these poems is more in accordance with the description of a meeting with Sassoon recorded in Sassoon's diary as having taken place on July 14th[45]. In a letter written only a few days later Graves referred to this meeting as having been on the 16th[46], while in *Goodbye To All That* he

claims he did not see Sassoon at all at this time and so instead 'sent him a rhymed letter'[47]. Given that Graves was severely wounded at High Wood on the 20th, it is not surprising that his recollection of events immediately before have become slightly muddled. The problem of dating is of more than merely passing interest, for 'A Dead Boche' has remarkable similarities to Sassoon's 'The rank stench of those bodies haunts me still', the manuscript of which is dated 'July 1916'[48]. As Graves had predicted[49], Sassoon had radically changed his ideas about the war and the poetic presentation of war since his first arrival in France, when he had criticised Graves for writing 'too realistically'. Like 'A Dead Boche', 'The rank stench of those bodies haunts me still' begins with a statement about remembering 'things I'd best forget', and ends by focussing on the physical details of a single corpse 'dead in a squalid, miserable ditch', and left there to rot as the war goes on unabated all around:

> His face was in the mud; one arm flung out
> As when he crumpled up; his sturdy legs
> Were bent beneath his trunk...

The similarities between these two poems suggests some form of collaboration or influence took place during the meeting on July 14th, which is also the date of Graves's poem. From the evidence available it is not possible to tell which poem came first, though as their meeting took place at a late hour, 'in the

darkness... with his men sleeping a little way off'[50], it is not unreasonable to speculate that Graves had written his poem during the day and showed it to Sassoon that night. However, even if Sassoon was influenced by Graves's poem, his own reaction to their similar experiences is quite distinct. Both corpses are to be found in 'woods' and are members of the Prussian Guards Reserve, but while Graves treats his corpse as a lifeless object, Sassoon imaginatively recreates the last moments of the young man for whom he expresses sympathy and pity. There is a hint in Sassoon's description of homoerotic attraction towards the young soldier, as the poet 'dare[s] to say' that he had 'a decent face' and was 'Young, fresh and pleasant'. This contrasts with the ugliness of Graves's Prussian, whose 'big belly', 'spectacles', and 'crop-hair' not only evoke an image of the Prussian's having been ugly while still alive, but contain a hint of contempt for a soldier who was overweight and short-sighted. That he is referred to only by the derogatory term 'Boche' and the indefinite article, also contrasts with Sassoon, whose sympathy for the dead soldier he describes, and the sense of his individuality he evokes, itself seem triggered by having overheard an English soldier's callous reflection on a day's fighting: 'The bloody Bosche [*sic*] has got the knock; / And soon they'll crumple up and chuck their games / We've got the beggars on the run at last'.

Given that Graves and Sassoon wrote these poems in the same corner of the war at the same moment in time, and given their close friendship and poetic 'partnership', the similarities between the poems, although remarkable, are not surprising. But this convergence of their poetic styles was short-lived. Within the month the war entered its bloodiest stage, both poets fought in the battle of the Somme, and Graves was seriously wounded; but whereas Sassoon's reaction to this was to join the pacifist movement and refuse to fight, while expressing even greater anger and bitterness in his poetry, Graves continued to serve despite his increasingly pacifist leanings and despite suffering from an increasingly severe case of neurasthenia, and his poetry expresses the moral and emotional contradictions such a situation entailed.

Loss of religious faith

In August 1914 Graves wrote what he called his 'last Christian-minded poem'[51]. He has described 'In the Wilderness' as 'silly, quaint [and] sentimental'[52], but despite this it is the only poem from *Over the Brazier* that he retained as part of his *Collected Poems 1975*. It is a highly idiosyncratic retelling of the Biblical story of Christ wandering in the wilderness, with, as Seymour-Smith has pointed out, Christ portrayed more like St Francis of Assisi than his traditional self[53]:

He heard the bitterns call
From ruined palace-wall,
Answered them brotherly.
He held communion
With the she-pelican
Of lonely piety.
Basilisk, cockatrice,
Flocked to his homilies...

The poem portrays Christ as the embodiment of human goodness, gentleness and love, whose endurance and patience in the face of hardship are invoked as a model for the poet about to face the hardships of a modern 'wilderness' in the trenches of northern France.

Soon after actually arriving in France, however, Graves began to experience serious doubts about his faith. In August 1915, seeing his chances of surviving the war as slim, he wrote a 'final' letter to George Johnstone in which a resigned acceptance of probable death is combined with an expression of religious doubt:

> This is in case I die. If I do, it'll be young & happy & in splendid company, without any fears of Hell or anxious hopes for Heaven; I leave all that to God: no good building on doubts.[54]

Graves's state of mind at this time was far from settled, and only two weeks after writing this letter he sent a poem, 'Big Words', to his sister Rosaleen. This represented, according to Graves's

father, 'a very fine expression of his feelings showing he had conquered the fear of death by a religious spirit which had drawn him nearer to God'[55]. The version of the poem sent to Rosaleen Graves does indeed display a confidence in death which draws its strength from an apparently firm basis of newly discovered belief:

> ...Winning a faith in the wisdom of God's ways
> That once I lost, finding it justified
> Even in this chaos; winning love that stays
> And warms the heart like wine at Easter-tide;
>   Having earlier tried
> False loves in plenty; oh! my cup of praise
> Brims over, and I know I'll feel small sorrow,
> Confess no sins and make no weak delays
> If death ends all and I must die tomorrow.

However, less than a month after Graves had sent 'Big Words' to his sister he took part in the ill-fated battle of Loos in which his battalion suffered extensive casualties[56]; it was in the wake of this, according to a pencilled note in his own edition of *Over the Brazier*[57], that he added a final couplet to the poem, a bitter postscript which turns the poem's meaning on its head by recanting the new-found profession of faith in a blunt and final manner:

> But on the firestep, waiting to attack,
> He cursed, prayed, sweated, wished the proud words back.

There is a total absence of Gravesian ebullience in 'Big Words' which gives even the clumsiest verses of *Over the Brazier* a youthful energy; instead, the slow, ponderous movement of the metre is more suggestive of emotional exhaustion than philosophical resignation. It is distinct from all the other poems of the period also in its language, which is entirely un-Gravesian in its piety: 'finding it firmlier with me...', 'warms the heart like wine at Easter-tide...', 'oh! my cup of praise / Brims over...'. This is Graves listening to the army chaplain's sermon and clinging to it for support. In the previous year at Charterhouse he had reacted in an entirely different way to another pious sermon, when the assembled boys had been told: 'life is a very awful thing! You young fellows are too busy being jolly to realise the folly of your lives'[58]. His impious reaction to these admonitions came in 'Youthful Folly':

> '...Though the preacher says it's folly,
> Is it foolish to be jolly?'
> I have often prayed in fear,
> Let me never grow austere;
> Let me never think, I pray,
> Too much about Judgement Day;
> Never, never feel in Spring
> 'Life's a very awful thing!'
> Then I realize and start
> And curse my arrogant young heart,
> Bind it over to confess
> Its horrible ungodliness,
> Set myself penances, and sigh

> That I was born in sin, and try
> To find the whole world vanity.

This, an agile verse for a schoolboy performance, is full of the boisterous rhythm and 'unmuffled gaiety' typical of early Graves, and totally unlike the arched formality and piety of 'Big Words'.

'Goliath and David'

After the horror of Loos and the death of Thomas, Graves lost all faith in the God he had been brought up to believe in. 'Goliath and David' dramatises this personal bereavement for Thomas and also this loss of faith, as well as demonstrating for the first time Graves's unique ability to bring ancient myth to life and at the same time add to it a new, contemporary and personal dimension. He had already re-invented the biblical story of Christ in the wilderness in order to adapt it to express his own state of mind, so that 'In the Wilderness' is as much 'about' adolescent loneliness and unhappiness as it is about the sufferings of the Son of Man. 'Goliath and David' is re-invented in the same manner, in order to express bereavement and despair. In Graves's version of the Old Testament myth, David loses his fight against the giant; this, he tells us, was the real, inevitable outcome of the contest, about which we have all been misled by the original 'historian of that fight', who 'Had not the heart to tell it right'.

Graves was in later life to make a profession out of claiming to set such records straight, from Irish legend to Roman history and the Gospels; in particular he was drawn to subjects where he felt an uncomfortable truth had been deliberately suppressed and replaced by a more palatable version, for political or religious ends, as he believed that 'to lie is a sacred duty to all people who wish to uphold sacred traditions'[59].

The Gravesian 'uncomfortable truth' in the particular case of the Goliath and David story is, however, a merely convenient invention: God, far from helping the faithful David to defeat the giant against all the odds, turns His back on him and all His creation. David fights to defend the 'God of Zion' from the scorn of the giant, but in the ensuing battle things go wrong for David and he is unable to match the over-powering force of his opponent. He fights on, however, trusting that 'God will save', but in the event 'God's eyes are dim, His ears are shut', and David dies, abandoned by the God he had fought to defend.

'Goliath and David' is technically one of the best of all Graves's war poems. He sustains the narrative over forty-six lines with an energetic verse and a simplicity of diction which transfers easily from the direct speech of battle to the lively evocation of the world of classical heroes:

> With hand thrust back, he cramps one knee,
> Poises a moment thoughtfully,

And hurls with a long vengeful swing.
The pebble, humming from the sling
Like a wild bee, flies a sure line
For the forehead of the Philistine;
Then... but there comes a brazen clink,
And quicker than a man can think
Goliath's shield parries each cast.
Clang! clang! and clang! was David's last.
Scorn blazes in the Giant's eye,
Towering unhurt six cubits high.
Says foolish David, 'Damn your shield!
And damn my sling! but I'll not yield.'
He takes his staff of Mamre oak,
A knotted shepherd-staff that's broke
The skull of many a wolf and fox
Come filching lambs from Jesse's flocks.

In 1938 Graves regretted that in his early work he had been overly 'preoccupied with the physical side of poetry'[60], and this poem is an example of the incompatibility between a technique which is assured and competent, and ideas and emotions which are comparatively immature and undeveloped, that such a preoccupation left him prone to. Part of this problem of incompatibility is Graves's choice of metre, the octosyllabic rhyming couplets which he frequently employed in the war poems. Of the seventeen war poems retained in his first collection, *Poems 1914-1926*, five are in this metre: 'Dead Cow Farm', 'Corporal Stare', 'Goliath and David', 'Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon', and 'The Leveller', while another three are in rhyming couplets with shorter or longer lines ('Escape', 'The

Legion' and 'To R. N.'). Graves began using couplets shortly after his discovery of Sorley in February 1916[61]. His enthusiasm for Sorley's work was immediate, finding him to be 'entirely after my own heart'[62], and his admiration for him grew over the next few years so that in 1919 he considered him to have been '<u>the</u> great loss of war'[63], more so even than Owen. In particular Graves admired 'All the hills and vales along'[64]:

> All the hills and vales along
> Earth is bursting into song,
> And the singers are the chaps
> Who are going to die perhaps.

Sorley's spirited, fluent verse combines with his deliberate use of bathos to expose some of the platitudes on which defence of the war is based. The lively couplets both deliver the platitudes and are part of the mechanism of irony which debunks the myth that the men are going cheerfully to a heroic death. Graves adopts both the couplet form and its vigorous energy from Sorley, but while the vivacity of Sorley may have seemed to Graves 'entirely after' his own heart, he does not share, at this stage of the war at least, the sense of irony on which Sorley's poem depends for its success.

The use of rhyming couplets was unusual in war poetry. Perhaps the most celebrated example was Brooke's 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester', which also employs tetrameters, and, as we have

seen, Brooke was offered to Graves as a stylistic model[65]. But in the Hibberd and Onions anthology of 1986[66] only nine poems out of one hundred and seventy-nine are in couplet form (excluding Sorley and Graves; 'Grantchester' is absent from the anthology). It is significant that among these it is only the minor poets of an older generation who employ the couplets to speak in a tone of earnest sincerity, with invariably disastrous results as in A. P. Herbert's 'Beaucourt Revisited', Margaret Sackville's 'The Game' and Jessie Pope's tasteless 'Cricket - 1915':

> Our cricketers have gone 'on tour',
> To make their country's triumph sure.
> They'll take the Kaiser's middle wicket
> And smash it by clean British Cricket.

Where the form is used more successfully it is in an ironic mode: Blunden's 'Pillbox', Squire's 'The Higher Life for Clergymen' and Gurney's 'The Target', though Gurney is also the only poet in the anthology to manage the form well in a serious poem, 'First Time In', written shortly after the war:

> Ulysses found little more in his wanderings no doubt.
> 'David of the White Rock', the 'Slumber Song' so soft, and that
> Beautiful tune to which roguish words by Welsh pit boys
> Are sung - but never more beautiful than there under the gun's noise.

The couplets in this poem are notably weakened by the abundance of half-rhyme and enjambement, by end-stopping with a full-stop

in mid couplet, and by the fact that the large majority of the rhymes are unstressed, so that the form is successfully adapted to a conversational tone of quiet reminiscence. In 'Goliath and David' on the other hand, Graves preserves the full integrity of the rhyming couplets, most of which are end-closed with the stress falling invariably on the rhyme, while the dominant rhythm is regularly iambic, producing an almost jingling effect inappropriate to the sense of bereavement he intends to convey.

'Goliath and David' ends with a dramatic portrayal of David's death, and here again the form works against the significance of the words. Concision and 'neatness' were to become a feature, and indeed a major virtue of Graves's work[67], but here the condensed treatment of the hero's death in a single couplet, with the short iambic line rushing with indecent haste to the inevitably stressed rhyme of 'dies', produces a somewhat ludicrous effect, with the emotional caesura and significant pause before the final foot only adding to a sense of unintentional bathos:

> 'I'm hit! I'm killed!' young David cries,
> Throws blindly forward, chokes... and dies.

The final couplet features the triumphant giant gloating over the dead hero:

> And look, spike-helmeted, grey, grim,
> Goliath straddles over him.

The spike-helmet was of course the notorious identification mark of the Kaiser's army, and giving the force of evil in the drama a contemporary, real-life identity in this way further undermines the universality of the myth as a vehicle for expressing personal loss. Bergonzi considers that if it were not for this specific, placing detail, 'Goliath and David' 'could be a poem of generalized nightmare, a pure symbol akin to, say, Edwin Muir's 'The Combat'[68]. Graves presumably later regretted this expression of anti-German sentiment, for in *Goodbye To All That* he makes it clear that he admired the common German soldiers, whom he knew were as little to blame for the war as the common British soldiers (and several of whom, besides, were his own cousins) and when the poem was reprinted in *Poems 1914-26* he replaced 'spike-helmeted' with 'steel-helmeted' (a change unnoted by Bergonzi). This alteration meant that what previously could only have been interpreted as a partisan apportioning of blame for the evil perpetrated, if not as an outright declaration of racial hatred, could now be read instead as an indictment against the war in general: all soldiers on both sides of the war were 'steel-helmeted'.

After Thomas's death and his own near-death in July 1916, Graves developed a pessimistic view of war as the inevitable behaviour of flawed human nature. Two poems in particular express this state of mind over the next year, 'Dead Cow Farm' and 'The Next War'. 'Dead Cow Farm' restates the theme of

'Goliath and David' in blaming the absence of any divine guidance as the cause of evil's triumph in the world. Instead of 'correcting' ancient myth in 'Dead Cow Farm', Graves invents his own pseudo-myth of a primeval deity, the 'Elemental Cow' who 'Began to lick cold stones and mud' and thus gave life to the first man and woman. But the Elemental Cow abandons her creation as David's God had abandoned His (though this time it is through death rather than divine senility) and in her absence the world reverts to chaos:

> Here now is chaos once again,
> Primeval mud, cold stones and rain.
> Here flesh decays and blood drips red,
> And the Cow's dead, the old Cow's dead.

Chaos and war are thus the inevitable result of a creation deserted by its creator and left to its own devices. Such an attitude gives the poems in which Graves protests against the war more a sense of despair rather than of anger - a despair often mingled with a sense of grim and bitter irony, as in 'The Next War':

> Another War soon gets begun,
> A dirtier, a more glorious one...
> Wars don't change except in name;
> The next one must go just the same,
> And new foul tricks unguessed before
> Will win and justify this War.
> Kaisers and Czars will strut the stage
> Once more with pomp and greed and rage;
> Courtly ministers will stop

> At home and fight to the last drop;
> By the million men will die
> In some new horrible agony...

This despair in the capacity of human nature to reform itself had a lasting effect on Graves's moral outlook on the world, and was one of the major effects of the war on his poetry. A characteristic of Graves's mature poetry is its egocentricity. This egocentricity has in turn led to a view held by some, that Graves was 'out of touch with his age'[69], or a 'runaway poet'[70], particularly after he resisted what many of his fellow poets in the nineteen-thirties saw as their moral duty to express through their writing a commitment to major political issues such as the fight against fascism. Instead of engagement or commitment, however, Graves consciously began to seek some form of 'independence' from 'civilization'[71].

NOTES

1. When *Goodbye To All That* was republished by Penguin Books in 1957 it was extensively revised by Graves; he omitted some of the more melodramatic and abrasive passages as well as some of the more personal statements. Most notably he omitted the 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding'.

2. GTAT29, p. 442.

3. O'PREY-1, letter to Liddell Hart 16 July 1941, p. 302.

4. Graves is one of five poets named on the floorstone, which is dedicated broadly to the poets of the First World War. The stone was laid in November 1985.

5. 'The Poets of World War II', in *The Common Asphodel* (1949), p. 307.

6. A phrase first used in *The White Goddess* (1948), p. 24.

7. D. N. Barbour, another friend at Charterhouse.

8. RPG-1, p. 117.

9. GTAT29, p. 25 and pp. 28-29.

10. GTAT29, pp. 17-26.

11. GTAT29, p. 88.

12. GTAT29, p. 61.

13. RPG-1, p. 111.

14. To the author on numerous occasions, 1977-80, and MS-S, p. 567.

15. GTAT29, p. 99.

16. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 3 February 1915, p. 30.

17. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 24 February 1916, p. 40.

18. See *Poetic Unreason*, pp. 19-20, and O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh No Date [February 1925], p. 157.

19. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 28 July 1918, p. 100.

20. Bernard Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight* (Constable, 1965), p. 41.

21. *Times Literary Supplement*, May 25th, 1916.

22. *Siegfried Sassoon, Diaries 1915-18*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis (Faber & Faber, 1983), p. 21.

23. GTAT29, p. 224.

24 From 'To Victory', quoted by Graves, GTAT29, p. 224.

25. The copy is in Graves's private library at his home in Deià, Mallorca.

26. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 22 May 1915, p. 31.

27. RG, *Collected Poems 1938*, Introduction p. xix.

28. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 24 February 1916, p. 41.

29. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh October 1915, p. 34.

30. 'Some Soldier Poets', *The Edinburgh Review*, no 462, vol 226 (October 1917) 296-316.

31. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 15 March 1916, pp. 42-43.

32. GTAT29, p. 251.

33. GTAT29, p. 163.

34. RPG-1, p. 142.

35. GTAT29, pp. 76-77, 86-87.

36. GTAT29, p. 229.

37. GTAT29, p. 264.

38. GTAT29, pp. 187-188, p. 283, and pp. 288-291.

39. In the Poetry/Rare Books Collection at the University of Buffalo.

40. RG, *On English Poetry*, p. 13 and pp. 84-85.

41. *Collected Poems 1938*, Introduction p. xv.

42. *Ibid.*

43. GTAT29, p. 261.

44. Note in RG, *Poems 1914-1926*, p. 56.

45. *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries, 1915-1918*, ed., Hart-Davis, p. 93.

46. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 26 July 1916, p. 56.

47. GTAT29, p. 263.

48. Silkin, Introduction to *First World War Poetry* (Penguin, 1979), pp. 126-127.

49. GTAT29, p. 224.

50. *Siegfried Sassoon Diaries 1915-1918*, p. 93.

51. *Collected Poems 1938*, Introduction p. xvi.

52. GTAT29, p. 33.

53. MS-S, p. 391.

54. RPG-1, p. 130.

55. Alfred Perceval Graves's diary, quoted in RPG-1, p. 131.

56. See O'PREY-1, p. 34: 'I don't know how I came through the last show unhurt; when our losses in combatant officers are considered, the odds worked out at three-to-one against my being the lucky survivor. Oh Eddie, there were some awful scenes...' (to Marsh, October 1915). See also GTAT29, pp. 205, 208-213.

57. The note reads: 'The postscript was added after Loos'. The copy is in Graves's library at Deià.

58. Headnote to the poem, printed in *Over the Brazier*, p. 28.

59. O'PREY-1, p. 321. This is particularly true of Graves's approach to 'reconstructing' an historical account of the life of Christ in *King Jesus* (1946), *The Nazarene Gospel Restored* (1953) and *Jesus in Rome* (1957). O'PREY-1, to Basil Liddell Hart 1 May 1944, p. 321 continues: 'I think that the answer to the question "Why don't we learn from History?" is, as you say, that History is so fraudulent; and in fact all that "we" learn is the technique of distortion... . The Jesus question is a difficult one. The real story was historically much better than the fake one... . But it had to be concealed for political reasons by those who had his teachings closest to their hearts...'.

60. *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xxi.

61. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 24 February 1916, pp. 39-40.

62. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 24 February 1916, p. 40.

63. O'PREY-1, letter to Sassoon 13 January 1919, p. 107.

64. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 24 February 1916, p. 40.

65. See O'PREY-1, pp. 30-32, letters to Marsh 22 January 1915, 3 February 1915, and 22 May 1915.

66. *Poetry of the Great War, An Anthology*, eds., Dominic Hibberd and John Onions (Macmillan, 1986).

67. See Sisson, *English Poetry 1900-1950* (Hart-Davis, 1971), p. 193: 'The quality of Graves's mind is... neatness... and neatness is one of the elements of literature'.

68. Bergonzi, *Heroes' Twilight*, p. 66.

69. See MS-S, pp. 559-560, Carter, p. 177 and the headnote to 'Tilth'.

70. V. Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 223; see also p. 46 for Cunningham's view that Graves 'shut himself away in Majorca'.

71. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, pp. 162-164.

CHAPTER TWO

'RECALLING WAR'

LATER AND RETROSPECTIVE ACCOUNTS OF THE WAR

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CHAPTER TWO

'RECALLING WAR':

LATER AND RETROSPECTIVE ACCOUNTS OF THE WAR

Post-war perceptions and representation in war anthologies

When Graves compiled his second *Collected Poems* in 1938, he omitted all war poems written during the war. They continued to be suppressed from further collections until four were published in the 1986 *Selected Poems*[1]. The complete war poems were published posthumously in 1988 in *Poems About War*, edited by William Graves, the American publication of which, in 1990, included four additional poems which were previously unpublished[2].

Graves excised the war poetry from his collected work on the straightforward grounds that it was not good poetry, but this has not affected his inclusion in war poetry anthologies, in which excellence is not necessarily the only or even the main criterion for selection. Owen declared that above all he was not concerned with poetry[3], and many anthologists have, one assumes, silently

concurred with him in making their selections. If the poetry is in the pity, the conclusion is that when the subject is war the priority of the poet, and consequently of the anthologist or reader, is not necessarily art. Donald Davie argued in 1964 that Owen's attitude made him not only an amateur soldier but an amateur poet[4], and he also included Rosenberg and Sassoon in this category. One can extend this argument further and say that, in one sense, appreciation of their poetry requires an amateur reading, or at least a leniency in 'professionally' critical judgements. For Graves, however, technical perfection was a principal concern even as a schoolboy, which makes him, in Davie's terms, perhaps the most 'professional' of all the war poets; nor would Graves have accepted the notion of any form of unprofessional reading of his own or others' poetry, given his dismissal of all war poetry as 'essentially higher journalism'[5].

Evaluation of First World War has historically tended to require more than an interpretation of the text alone, as demands have been made on each text's validity as a witness and interpretation of 'real-life' experience subject to certain historical and political terms of reference. The process of transforming this extreme experience into literature, with poets as 'witnesses of history'[6], began at the start of the war, with the appearance of numerous volumes of poetry. Such was the literary and extra-literary impact of this poetry 'boom', that the poetry itself became an integral part of the nation's war experience, performing both a

reactive and pro-active function. As a record of the thoughts and feelings of those caught up in the war it was a reaction to experience; as 'higher journalism' designed to shock the complacent and increase awareness of the reality of the war, it assumed an active role by seeking to change opinion and alter the course of events. Compared with newspaper articles and government communiqués, poetry constituted an unofficial and, if taken in its entirety, a broadly popular history of emotional response. In 1941 Graves wrote that 'poems about the horrors of the trenches were originally written to stir the ignorant and complacent people at home to a realization of what a "fight to the finish" involved'[7]. He added to this statement in 1949 by observing that he and other poets felt a moral duty to treat their experiences realistically: 'We felt bound to supplement the rosy official accounts of execrable battles, of which the writer had no first-hand experience, with unofficial sidelights on their realistic horrors'[8].

The situation for the modern reader is different to that of the contemporary, for we cannot help but assess the poetic interpretation of the war in the light of detailed prose accounts, notably by Sassoon, Blunden and Graves himself, and of an abundance of scholarly writing by modern professional historians. That the poetry can sustain such comparison is testified by the military historian, John Keegan, who in *The Face of Battle* states 'that what Sassoon, Graves, Blunden had to say was not private

and subjective but an expression of the feelings of a whole generation'[9]. Realising that this is something of a sweeping generalisation, however, Keegan qualifies it by allowing that there were a number of people who tolerated or even enjoyed the war, but that nevertheless the overwhelming majority would 'probably' have perceived in the poetry written by Graves and others 'a truthfulness to which they could assent'[10].

The nature of war poetry has allowed it to evade evaluation on purely artistic grounds, and the fact that we continue to accept its validity in 'non-professional' terms must therefore be due to a widespread sympathy with the thoughts and feelings it expresses. There is a political agenda in the best of the war poetry implicit in its horror of violence and aggression, its pity for the pain and suffering endured by the victims of war, as well as in its accusatory standpoint towards those who encouraged the continuance of the conflict or who passively aquiesced in accepting and repeating what Owen called 'the old lie', that there is honour or glory in patriotic death. This agenda is one which the modern, mainly liberal humanist version of the Great War is in sympathy with, which is hardly surprising, for in making their historical judgements, post-war generations have been strongly influenced by this emotionally potent evidence offered by the poets. Keegan, writing in 1976, declared that 'the Battle of the Somme has, in a sense, not ended yet'[11]. He was speaking as a militarist, for the Somme continues to influence British strategic

thinking about the nature of battle - but he claims that this influence is due in large part to the literature that the Somme experience engendered; if so, this surely represents a massive victory on the part of the war poets, in more than any purely literary sense.

The representation of Graves in the major war poetry anthologies has been variable and unpredictable, compared to other poets such as Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Rosenberg, Thomas, Blunden and Gurney, while anthologists who have included Graves have not demonstrated a consensus of opinion on the best or most representative of his war poems. Graves was hostile to the notion of anthologies *per se*, an attitude he shared with Laura Riding and which was the subject of their second collaborative work *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies*, published in 1928. However, their objection was principally against what they termed 'popular trade anthologies', designed for a somewhat mythical 'general reading public' which 'asks from anthologies neither unauthoritative examples of private taste, nor historical material in the raw, nor criticism'[12], all of which, they asserted, offered genuine reasons for an anthology. The popular anthology was detrimental to poetry because it yoked together disparate poetic voices, exaggerated the reputations of poets who had written poems which particularly suited the anthology medium, and because it established a distinct canon which was not dictated by excellence but by commercial opportunism. Although Graves and

Riding do not mention war poetry anthologies as a group, these perhaps can be seen as forming part of one of the few 'acceptable' categories of anthology, the 'historical' anthology which acts as a 'compendium of all the political verse of any obvious period, for example the French Revolution'[13] ('political' would seem here to be used in a loose way as the opposite of what they elsewhere call 'private' poetry). Such an anthology should, in their opinion, be 'uncritical'[14], exempt from the normal standards of literary critical judgement, and it is perhaps for this reason that Graves did not raise objections to or set conditions for his inclusion in war poetry anthologies, as he did in connection with general anthologies, such as Roberts's *Faber Book of Modern Verse* and Yeats's Oxford anthology[15]. The erratic nature of his representation in the war anthologies was not, then, due to his own imposed restrictions or reservations, but depended on the ideological or critical criteria for selection established by individual editors, which have changed as the poetry of the war has been gradually reassessed from both a political and literary viewpoint.

If one looks at the five anthologies surveyed by George Parfitt in his chapter on 'Reception and Valuing' in *English Poetry of the First World War* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), one sees a lack of consistency in the 'valuing' of Graves's war poetry by the anthologists. E. B. Osborn's *The Muse in Arms*[16], published during the war in November 1917, includes three of Graves's

poems: 'Big Words', 'Goliath and David' and 'Escape'. This compares with Sassoon's two, Brooke's two ('If I should die' is the opening poem), Gurney's four, and Robert Nichols's eleven. The anthology now reads oddly because it omits entirely the two writers generally considered today to be the major voices among active combatants, Owen and Rosenberg. Osborn makes the claim for his anthology that it is 'fairly representative'[17], but the partisan nature of his edition is clear from his introduction, as well as in the choice of poets (many now forgotten) who are predominantly officers who bring to their poetry a symbolism derived from their education in 'famous schools and ancient universities'[18]. Osborn boasts that his anthology is 'the first coherent picture of the British warrior's moods and emotions in war-time which has ever been painted by himself', and as such is 'far more valuable than all the huge harvest of war poetry by civilian verse-makers'[19]. Graves might have sympathised with this latter statement, but he was later very dismissive of the anthology, commenting that its contributors were 'all very gallant and idealistic but with hardly a poet among them'[20]. The emphasis of this gallantry and idealism was a deliberate strategy by Osborn, whose aim is to present an image of war as a meaningful activity with overtones of chivalry and sport. He admits to collecting poems which give 'a stirring picture of modern warfare'[21] and expresses a patriotic confidence in an ultimate victory for England because of the moral (and, it is implied, poetic) superiority of that nation[22].

A month later, in December 1917, *More Songs by the Fighting Men*[23] appeared, which had no named editor and featured no poems by Graves or by any other of the now well-known poets. The ideology of this anthology is a reaction to the realism then being attempted by poets such as Sorley, Graves and Sassoon, for it carefully presents the war as 'a positive, in having given rise to a new, pure lyricism'[24] by poets who 'are nobly free from that realism which thinks a stench more real than a perfume'[25]. The author of poems such as 'A Dead Boche' and 'To R. N.' clearly had no appeal to such an anthologist. The *Anthology of War Poetry 1914-1918*, edited by Robert Nichols[26], himself one of the war poets who enjoyed a contemporary success, was, on the other hand, generous to Graves. Nichols denies any ideological criterion to his selection, insisting that he has not 'assembled' the anthology to 'indulge' in 'propaganda for or against war as an instrument of policy', but instead has made 'poetic merit the sole criterion of choice'[27]. However, given that it was published in 1943, in the midst of another world war, it is perhaps inevitably not a neutral document, particularly as its intended audience is primarily the new generation of soldiers caught up in similar experiences and 'private emotions' to those described in the poems he selects[28]. That Nichols used the anthology to express a personal opinion on the war and the poetic response to it, is evident in the sheer size of his introduction: eighty-three pages of 'Preface' (excluding bibliographical and reference material) introduce fifty pages of poems. Nichols's purpose was to

'illumine the present with a light from the past'[29], but also to demonstrate that the 'battle is for the private life'[30], and his selection concentrates on 'poems written out of the emotions of persons... essentially private, but whose private life had ceased to exist'[31]. Graves is well-represented, with eight poems: 'Escape', 'Two Fusiliers', 'The Dead Fox Hunter', 'Not Dead', 'Recalling War', '1915', 'Over the Brazier', and 'The Leveller'. Rosenberg, Gurney and Thomas are absent, though Owen is represented with four poems, Brooke with five, Blunden with nine and Sassoon with thirteen. Graves, Blunden and Sassoon are in fact the major voices in the anthology, though the highest praise in the introduction is for Owen, whose poems are 'by far the most beautiful written during the war'[32].

The continued rise of Owen's reputation is marked by his domination of Jon Silkin's 1979 *Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, perhaps the most influential of modern anthologies. Silkin acknowledges a correlation between the number of poems by which individual poets are represented and his evaluation of that poet's 'excellence':

> ...the reader will be correct in thinking that the more poems there are by a poet the more highly I think of him.[33]

Apart from Brooke (two poems), 'who appears as the representative of Georgian poetics'[34], and poems expressing 'that

patriotism which distinguished the opening phases of the war'[35], 'the case' for selection again claims to 'rest on excellence', rather than 'the representation of extrinsic concerns'[36]. The problem with Silkin's method is that he does not define what he means by excellence, though as Parfitt has pointed out it is clearly 'not primarily an aesthetic matter'[37]. In his Introduction to the poems, Silkin faces up to the problem of an anthologist's ideological position inevitably directing his or her selection of poems: 'we shall never not be political again'[38]. Silkin's own political ideology is resolutely anti-war and his selection represents the personal commitment outlined in a polemical introduction, in which he arranges the poems into four 'stages of consciousness'[39]. The first, of which Brooke is most representative, is 'the passive reflection of, or conduit for, the prevailing patriot ideas'[40]. The second, 'properly represented by Sassoon'[41] is protest. The third 'stage of consciousness' is compassion, typified by Owen, while the final stage - and one is led to infer the most 'excellent', at least politically - is one in which 'anger and compassion are merged, with extreme intelligence, into an active desire for change, a change that will re-align the elements of human society in such a way as to make it more creative and fruitful'[42]. This is most clearly found in the poetry of Rosenberg, who is represented by seventeen poems, placing him almost on a par with Owen. Graves's rather confused course through the war, and his undeterred enthusiasm for comradeship, friendship and regimental tradition and ritual,

clearly do not fit neatly into any of these 'stages of consciousness'; his better poems are too ambiguous about the war to appeal to an overtly anti-war editor and not surprisingly, perhaps, he is represented in the anthology by only two poems, 'Recalling War' and 'To Robert Nichols', both of which present a negative image of war experience. This places Graves on a par with Brooke, and he is significantly under-represented in comparison to Gurney (six poems), Sassoon (ten poems), and Thomas and Blunden (both with twelve poems).

Hibberd and Onions's *Poetry of the Great War* was published in 1986[43], and remains the most scholarly and authoritative anthology to date. It is a more sober assessment of the poetry of the war than that which grew out of what the editors refer to as Silkin's 'radical political commitment'[44], and if there is an ideological bias to their selection it is well concealed by a remarkably 'general' aim, 'to provide a readable and reliable picture of poetry by British writers composed during or soon after the Great War, showing how poets and poetry responded to the crisis and how some dominant themes were explored'[45]. It is, then, an example of what Riding and Graves called the 'historical anthology' and they would no doubt have approved its relatively 'uncritical' stance, for 'excellence' was consciously not their 'overriding criterion', which allowed them to include historically interesting verses 'that would not have merited inclusion on solely literary grounds'[46]. There is no stated correlation here between

merit and the number of poems included, and although their inclusion of many more poets and poems than usual makes comparison difficult, it is notable that Graves's seven poems ('The Legion', 'A Dead Boche', 'Not Dead', 'Dead Cow Farm', 'Goliath and David', 'Two Fusiliers' and 'Haunted') is on a par with Blunden and Brooke (six), Rosenberg (seven), Gurney (eight), Owen (ten), and Sassoon (fourteen). Silkin's reduction of Graves as an anthology poet suggested that true to Graves's own wishes his war poetry was likely in future to be neglected and forgotten. His 'restoration' fifteen years later by Hibberd and Onions is due, one assumes, both to the absence of 'excellence' as a criterion in their selection, and to their more remarkable and radical rejection of the 'assumed progression from idealism to bitterness'[47] which forms the basis of Silkin's and other modern anthologies[48]. Hibberd and Onions challenge the traditional reading of the poetry of the war, as 'a story of idealism turning to realism, satire, protest and pity'[49]. Such a reading has its obvious attractions, for it provides a convincing mythology for the onset of a pervasive sense of disillusion in twentieth century culture, but the Hibberd and Onions anthology makes a convincing argument for a more complex approach. Their selection shows the work of individual poets developing along different lines at different times and they conclude that 'it is not really possible to make the war's poetry follow a single inclusive argument'[50]. They criticise the idealism to bitterness structure as too rigid a framework which depends on a selective reading of a small group

of unrepresentative poets, especially Owen and Sassoon, and which is unable to accommodate the majority of the poetry written during the war. Their simple tactic of trying to date all poems as accurately as possible is particularly revealing: the case, not cited by them, of the 'realism' of 'It's a Queer Time' is a clear example of the need for an adequate chronology and is further evidence that the use they make of biographical information 'to clarify the meaning of a war poem'[51] is a particularly fruitful one in this area.

Hibberd and Onions correctly state that 'Graves was not to express a consistent view of the war until he came to write his memoirs a decade later'[52]. His contemporary response to the war followed no steady course; he did not progress through a developing sequence of awakenings or stages of consciousness, but instead lurched 'here and there by guess / And God and hope and hopelessness', as he describes his path through life in 'Flying Crooked' and which, in its erraticness, is perhaps a no less representative image of First World War poetry than that of a direct 'journey from innocence to protest'[53]. Graves was, as we have seen, one of the first poets to attempt to write honestly and realistically about the war, at a time when, in the traditionally deconstructed version of events, poetry was marked by passivity, unquestioningly accepting violence and aggression as part of a patriotic ideal. He later strove to achieve even greater truthfulness, but he also preserved a sense of idealism throughout

the war, despite his political opposition to it, and this gives a remarkable celebratory quality to several of the poems written in the latter stages of the conflict. The contradictory keynotes of Graves's post-Somme poetry are escapism and idealism, which do not fit in with the myth whose chronology has the war end with a unison of bitterness and protest, and in which 'enthusiast responses' inevitably 'become marginal'[54].

Celebration of 'comradeship' and regimental pride

Graves became increasingly enthusiastic as the war progressed about the spirit of comradeship among the men serving at the Front. The admiration he felt for his fellow soldiers developed into an intense emotion of fellowship and love, described by him in a lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University in 1965:

> At the outbreak of the First World War I volunteered for the regular infantry and found myself among men whom detestable trench conditions and persistent danger either destroyed or ennobled. Although we were caught in a demonic machine, officially sanctified by a corps of regular padres; although the war's final result would be worse than the power-politics that had caused it, ordinary civilized virtues had given place to heroic ones. We remained free because we were volunteers and bound to one another by a suicidal sacrament. Holding a trench to the last round of ammunition

> and the last man, taking a one-in-three chance of life when rescuing a badly wounded comrade from no-man's-land, keeping up a defiant pride in our soldierly appearance: these were poetic virtues. Our reward lay in their practice, with possible survival as a small bright light seen at the end of a long tunnel. We despised all civilians; wounds were nothing by comparison with the grief of losing new-found friends in the periodic massacres.[55]

This passage is fundamental to an understanding of the war's impact on Graves's poetry. The bond between soldiers is of course an integral factor in the British Army's regimental structure; in *Goodbye To All That* Graves wrote that he and his fellow officers agreed that 'regimental pride was the greatest moral force that kept a battalion going as an effective fighting unit, particularly [in contrast to] ...patriotism and religion'[56]. Graves was himself immensely proud of belonging to the Royal Welch Fusiliers, which boasted one of the most distinguished and individual regimental histories in the British Army. The enthusiasm he displays in retelling this history in *Goodbye To All That* proves his loyalty to the regiment had not diminished despite having been by then on the retired list for ten years.

In all his war poems, Graves's preferred term for both officers and other ranks is 'fusilier'. This is significant, for it reinforces the sense of group identity by inferring the group's distinctiveness. It also emphasises the historical context of regimental tradition, the word itself being derived from the name

of an ancient weapon, the seventeenth century 'fusil', or light musket. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the designation 'fusilier' is 'still retained by certain regiments in the British Army which are distinguished from other regiments of the line only by some small peculiarities of costume'. That this distinctiveness is important to Graves is clear from the fact that he devotes a whole page of *Goodbye To All That* to the preservation of the 'flash', a bunch of five black ribbons which is the 'distinctive badge' of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, worn to commemorate the regiment's 'exemplary service in the Napoleonic War'[57]. 'Fusilier' thus carries with it a sense of pride at belonging to an elite few, bound together by a 'suicidal sacrament' and set apart from the rest of society - even the rest of society in France. His preferred synonym for 'fusilier' is the affectionate 'men' or 'boys', rather than the generic, more impersonal 'soldiers', while he avoids altogether anything more rhetorical, such as Brooke's 'warrior'. One of the principal themes of *Goodbye To All That* is the struggle to become accepted as part of this special group and to live up to the expectations it made on its individual members. However, that Graves was by the nature of his personality unsuited to the conformity and narrow-mindedness of the officer's mess is clear not only from his own account, but also from Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, which tell us that Graves never fully succeeded in being accepted by his comrades. In Sassoon's novel Graves is cast as 'David Cromlech', a 'fad-ridden crank' whose unpopularity in all three battalions of the

regiment is related at length; the other officers despised him as unmilitary and a 'rotten outsider', redeemed only by his personal courage at the Front, and by the fact that he was 'not windy in trenches'[58].

Although not popular in the mess, Graves proved to the regiment that he possessed the essential qualities of courage and loyalty and eventually earned a place of honour as one of a small group of survivors who had been on active service for almost the entire period of conflict. Paul Fussell's account of *Goodbye To All That* as a 'stage comedy'[59], a satirical description of the war, makes no reference to this painful struggle to be accepted by his comrades, nor does it take account of the importance which Graves attached to regimental tradition, and which perhaps more than anything helped sustain his sanity, jeopardised in the worst moments of life in trenches. Fussell's analysis of Graves's narrative technique is perceptive but unjustly reductive, for he concentrates on only one aspect of Graves's style and by doing so exaggerates its significance. There is no question that, as Fussell observes, Graves is an accomplished satirist, 'a joker, a manic illusionist'[60], who enjoys telling a good story and is capable of colourful embellishment; but to emphasise this particular narrative technique at the expense of several others employed by Graves, as well as at the expense of his underlying earnestness, is to miss the wood for the trees.

Goodbye To All That is an attack on what Graves saw as the destructive effect on his own life of various manifestations of human folly, whether on the part of his parents, his fellow pupils and teachers at school, or the politicians or senior officers who controlled his life during the war; it is also a defiant declaration of a strategy to elude their further influence. Preoccupation with the absurdities of this behavioural folly, and the iconoclastic humour with which family life is described, recall Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, a book Graves discovered and, to the consternation of his family, greatly admired while still at Charterhouse[61]. A recurrent theme of Graves's poetry during the twenties and thirties is a desire to escape ancestral tradition and free himself from inherited family traits: poems such as 'No More Ghosts', 'The Haunted House', 'A Country Mansion' and 'The Cloak' are an attempt to exorcise the 'demons in the dry well'. In 'No More Ghosts' the 'patriarchal bed' - and one does not have to be a Freudian to associate this with his parents and the sexual act which led to the procreation of their kind - is 'hauled from the attic glooms' and although it cannot be destroyed, for one cannot escape the past or refuse one's genetic inheritance, the poet is able to saw the wood up, to ensure as complete a break as possible from his parents and make the best of his legacy by undoing their world and reconstructing the elements into 'wholesome furniture for wholesome rooms'. *Goodbye To All That* is part of this rejection and reconstruction process.

The valedictory of Graves's autobiography, made obviously and memorably apparent in the title, derives much of its force from the comparison Graves makes between himself and another, even earlier, autobiographer, Lord Herbert of Cherbury. In the 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding' omitted in the 1957 revised version, Graves points to a direct parallel between the story of his own life and that of Herbert's, whose autobiography, written in 1624, tells how he was 'educated as a gentleman, studied at Oxford, married young, travelled, played games, fought in Northern France and wrote books...'[62]. The connection is given a further, typically Gravesian quality, by the 'coincidence' that Herbert's brother was a great poet and that his son founded the Royal Welch Fusiliers - the significance of which is so important to Graves he tells the reader of it twice[63]. The real force of the comparison for Graves, however, is that Herbert's 'active life ended with a sudden clap of thunder from the blue sky which did "so comfort and cheer" him that he resolved at last, at this sign, to print his book *De Veritate*, concerning truth'[64].

At the end of *Goodbye To All That* Graves announced his intention never to make England his home again and believed that at the same stroke his 'active life' would end. By writing his autobiography he would have 'parted with [himself] for good', after which he intended to remove himself from the world of human affairs and devote himself to the pursuit of truth and the

practice of poetry: 'No more anecdotes... no more politics, religion, conversations, literature, arguments, dances, drunks, time, crowds, games, fun, unhappiness'[65]. This form of social suicide was preceded by the sudden, unexpected entry into his life of the American poet, Laura Riding, whom he compares to the clap of thunder in the blue sky that had given Herbert the courage to publish his thoughts. The writing of *Goodbye To All That* was precipitated by Riding's actual suicide attempt, a crisis which brought a number of issues in Graves's life to a head and forced him to a resolution of many of them, while the seriousness of the crisis perhaps enabled him to express his true feelings about the war, which he had long struggled ineffectively to do, both in his poetry and in an abandoned novel. At Oxford after the war Graves and Edmund Blunden spent much of their time talking each other 'into an almost hysterical state about the trenches', and agreed that they would not be fully recovered until they 'got all that talk on to paper'[66]. It seems to have taken another major upheaval in his life to have enabled him to do just that.

Judging from the 'Dedicatory Epilogue', Graves considered *Goodbye To All That* to be his own book 'concerning truth', his own *De Veritate*. As autobiography, *Goodbye To All That* constitutes a ruthless attempt to present what he saw as the truth, without regard for the damage it might cause to the feelings of his family or friends, few of whom considered his version of the truth to be accurate or objective[67], and without consideration for the

damage he might cause to his own reputation - the open acknowledgement of his early homosexuality, for example, was particularly courageous for the time. The honesty of his intent, and his passionate belief that what he was writing constituted an unpalatable truth, drives the narrative with an almost zealous force, so that Fussell is surely right, despite his tendency to dwell on Graves's satirical method, that it is one of the three 'classic' books which have 'most effectively memorialized the Great War as a historical experience with conspicuous imaginative and artistic meaning'[68].

Graves was vigorous in his celebration of comradeship, while his immense pride in regiment has, as Parfitt observes, 'more in common with professional soldiers like Joseph Lee than with amateurs'[69]. The clearest expression of what Graves called, in the Oxford lecture quoted above, the 'sacramental bond' between fellow soldiers, is 'Two Fusiliers'. The opening lines state that the two soldiers have no need to make any pledges or oaths to each other, being 'By firmer stuff / Close bound enough'. The second verse explores the nature of this bond, with its quasi religious quality suggested through an incantatory rhythm, while the imagery of the Somme is listed as if it were canonically required for the sacrament to be performed:

> By wire and wood and stake we're bound,
> By Fricourt and by Festubert,

> By whipping rain, by the sun's glare...

This litany of shared suffering is the prelude to defining the true nature of their deep friendship, for it is not their shared experience of life or physical suffering which brings them together, so much as a shared intimacy with death:

> Show me the two so closely bound
> As we, by the wet bond of blood,
> By friendship, blossoming from mud,
> By Death: we faced him, and we found
> Beauty in Death,
> In dead men breath.

The two fusiliers of the poem are probably Graves and Sassoon, but shortly after this was written the friendship with Sassoon was placed under strain by Graves's uninvited intervention in Sassoon's pacifist rebellion against the war. Advised by Bertrand Russell, Sassoon had disobeyed army orders and refused to serve further whilst the war continued. By pulling strings and pleading both in Whitehall and at battalion headquarters, Graves succeeded in having Sassoon declared medically unfit, with his mental health affected by shell shock[70]. Although this saved Sassoon from the trauma of a court-martial, it spoiled the political effect of the protest. Graves was shocked by Sassoon's rebellion, describing it in a letter to Edward Marsh as 'an awful thing - completely mad'[71]. He shared Sassoon's abhorrence of the war and agreed

with him that the original aims had been forgotten and that it had become a pointless 'sacrifice of the younger generation to the stupidity and self-protective alarm of the elder'[72]. His disapproval of his action was not on political or military grounds, but based on a firmly held belief that by refusing to serve further Sassoon was betraying the sacred 'wet bond of blood' with his fellow soldiers, who would be left to continue without him. Until Sassoon's action, Graves had intended dedicating *Fairies and Fusiliers* to him, but just before publication he altered it, dedicating the book to the regiment rather than to any individual member, explaining that 'to point [his] devotion to the regiment would strengthen [his] expression of hatred for the war[73]. A row between them ensued, with Graves writing to Sassoon:

> The Bobbies and Tommies and so on, who are the exact people whom you wish to influence and save by all your powers, are just the people whose feelings you are going to hurt most by turning round in the middle of the war, after having made a definite contract, and saying 'I've changed my mind'... . You can only command their respect by sharing all their miseries as far as you possibly can, being ready for pride's sake to finish your contract whatever it costs you, yet all the time denouncing the principles you are being compelled to further.[74]

This passage is important not only because it expresses Graves's own attitude to the war in its latter stages and explains why he continued pressing to be allowed to return to active service in

France at a time when his physical condition offered him more than sufficient grounds for home duty; but it also provides an informative gloss on Sassoon's poem 'Banishment', written no later than a month after Graves's letter accusing him of betrayal. 'Banishment' records Sassoon's decision to return to the war despite his continued opposition to it, out of a sense of guilt at having abandoned his comrades in France:

> Love drove me to rebel.
> Love drives me back to grope with them through hell;
> And in their tortured eyes I stand forgiven.

In November Sassoon went before a medical board for the second time, having first secured an assurance from the War Office that he would be discharged from Craiglockhart and returned to a front line battalion; he then wrote to Graves telling him that he no longer cared whether he lived or died[75].

Graves's disapproval of Sassoon's protest became more complicated after Graves's physical health deteriorated to the point where he had to accept, apparently reluctantly, that further front line service had become impossible[76]. The knowledge that he had an honourable and justified discharge from duty soon led to a new tone of optimism in his letters and poems - a tone which jarred in Sassoon's now rather sensitive ears, and which was most prevalent in those poems which celebrated regimental pride and comradeship. Sassoon wrote to Graves, while still at

Craiglockhart, that his optimism and idealism was 'a very estimable form of suicidal stupidity and credulity', and added that if Graves had 'real courage' he would not 'acquiesce' as he did[77]. In reply, Graves accused Sassoon of having 'lost heart' and told him not to send any more of his miserable 'corpse poems'[78]. This exchange of letters demonstrates how unbridgeable the gap in their attitudes to the war had become.

One of the poems disapproved of by Sassoon was 'To Lucasta On Going To The Wars - For the Fourth Time'. The light-hearted depiction of war in this poem is reminiscent of the war poems Graves had written before first embarking for France, while the tone has more in common with the patriotic verses of 1914 than with post-Somme realism. It is Graves's most overt celebration of regimental pride, which in the poem overrides all other considerations, including love or fear of death. Graves had been to the wars himself three times - the 'fourth time' refers to an expected posting to Palestine, which had become his only chance of remaining on active service now that a return to France was out of the question[79].

The title of the poem is of course an ironic reference to Lovelace's famous lyric and this should serve to warn the reader to expect a very literary and artificial description of experience. The 'fusilier' of the poem is a man wholly unlike Graves: he is a swaggering Cavalier, who strikes heroic postures and scorns any

concern for suffering or death, though there is a suggestion in lines 9 and 10 that there may be a more thoughtful and sensitive character hiding behind the exterior posturing. At this point he seems to have to struggle to hold on to his feelings and his laughter appears nervous:

> [He] laughs as calmly as he can
> And flings an oath, but says no more.

Parfitt describes this as 'the behavioural mask of [a] weary combatant': 'the laughing, swearing fusilier... is a modern cavalier and the pose is what matters, what you live for, and thus a defence mechanism'[80]. This is only partly true, for the vivacity of the poem belies the war-weariness which Parfitt emphasises in his account. Judging from his letters, Graves does not seem to have been as weary of the war at the time of writing these lines as one might expect; on the contrary, his dominant emotion seems to have been euphoria at having survived it[81]. 'To Lucasta' is addressed to his regimental comrades - to whom this and all the poems in *Fairies and Fusiliers* was dedicated - and had the specific function of trying to raise their spirits. Graves was by his own admission a 'sound militarist'[82] who took his officer's responsibility for troop morale with the utmost seriousness, and just as he wrote to Owen at his mental hospital telling him to cheer up and remember that as a poet he should have 'a spirit above wars'[83], 'To Lucasta' and another poem of this time, 'The

Legion', is an admonishment to his comrades still in trenches to remember their pride as members of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, and encouraging them to draw on this pride as a source of strength in moments of hardship.

An inevitable, if perhaps unintentional, result of inviting comparison with Lovelace is to show the poverty of the modern poet's attitude to the war. The courtly posturing of the seventeenth century man of arms is underpinned by a genuine belief in a chivalric code of honour which even his mistress has to admit gives duty as a soldier priority over love:

> Yet this Inconstancy is such,
> As thou too shalt adore;
> I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Lov'd I not honour more.

In Graves's poem honour is reduced to vainglory, as the fusiliers' pride has no significance in a wider moral or social context. There is for Graves's cavalier no commitment or belief except the desperation of the suicidal bond which binds him to his comrades:

> It doesn't matter what's the cause,
> What wrong they say we're righting...

Lucasta's role, both for Lovelace and for Graves, is of course to be left behind at home; in the militarized society of 1917 this

makes her a civilian[84]. As Graves told his Oxford audience in 1965 (see pages 95-96) he and his comrades 'despised all civilians' for their misguided patriotism and their generally astonishing ignorance of the reality of what the men in France were suffering. Unlike the original, therefore, Graves's Lucasta cannot 'adore' her lover's cause - as a civilian she cannot be expected to even understand it:

> Don't plume yourself he fights for you;
> It is no courage, love, or hate
> That lets us do the things we do...

'The Legion' and Owen's '*Apologia Pro Poemate Meo*'

Two other poems celebrating regimental pride, 'The Legion' and 'Cuirassiers of the Frontier', also employ historical parallels; set in the period of the Roman empire, they are both skilful displays of Graves's talent for dramatizing history and despite the subjects' distance in time and place they constitute a more vigorous comment on the contemporary scene than most of his 'modern' verse. 'The Legion' is in the form of a dialogue between Strabo and Gracchus on the state of a legion referred to as 'the twenty-third' - which we learn from the potted regimental history in *Goodbye To All That* also describes the Royal Welch

Fusiliers. The legion is 'dead in the first year of this damned campaign', and has been reinforced with raw recruits whom Strabo despises as poor substitutes for the 'brave lads', his comrades who died in battle. The analogy with the Great War is obvious, when regular troops who had witnessed the decimation of the original Expeditionary Force were demoralized by the replacement of their professional and idealistically motivated comrades by hastily trained and usually reluctant conscripts (Graves later commented that the Conscription Act changed the 'character of British war poetry'[85]). Gracchus counters the despair expressed by Strabo by insisting that the new recruits will try their best and deserve to be accepted, their courage acknowledged. Besides, the Legion will always be the Legion - its collective importance being greater than the sum of its parts:

> 'They all try, Strabo; trust their hearts and hands.
> The Legion is the Legion while Rome stands,
> And these same men before the autumn's fall
> Shall bang old Vercingetorix out of Gaul.'

As in 'To Lucasta', Graves's intention is clearly to address his fellow soldiers with the intention of rallying their flagging spirits, helping them to 'cheer up'. Owen admired this poem very much, describing it to Sassoon as 'too glorious' and in identifying Graves with Gracchus expressed his personal admiration for him:

> I tell you I can not believe I rode in a taxi with the man Gracchus. But I did, and he has cursed, battered on the table, over a poor word of mine.[86]

In the same letter Owen acknowledges Graves's attempts to mend broken spirits, telling Sassoon that he liked Graves's verse letter to Sassoon better than Sassoon's to Graves, and lamenting that if Graves's 'tetrameters aren't enough' to bring Sassoon to his 'senses', then his own 'drivel' could not hope to have any effect whatsoever.

Owen had ordered several copies of *Fairies and Fusiliers* prior to its publication in October 1917, and we know from his letters that he 'rejoiced' in these poems, writing in January 1918 that the poems of Graves and Sassoon 'simply say what Everyman most needs... Graves's technique is perfect'[87]. Given this admiration for Graves, Owen was pleased to show his own war poems to him, via Sassoon, who was then at Craiglockhart with Owen. Graves replied, in December 1917, with a criticism first of Sassoon for descending into bathos, and then reproached Owen for a lack of 'optimism', telling him to cheer up, for 'a poet should have a spirit above wars'[88]. Owen's reply to this has been lost but he addressed the issue directly in a poem written shortly after, '*Apologia Pro Poemate Meo*', which defends his emotional stance to suffering and death, and his lack of any Gravesian brightness or humour. The poem begins by reassuring the reader

(Graves?) that he too possesses a spirit capable of seeing 'God through mud':

> I, too, have...
> ...sailed my spirit surging light and clear
> Past the entanglement where hopes lay strewn...

In the fifth verse Owen makes a direct reference to Graves's 'Two Fusiliers', echoing its imagery to prove his own sense of comradeship is as strong as Graves's:

> I have made fellowships...
> ...wound with war's hard wire whose stakes are strong.

The poem ends, however, with a clear warning that readers will look in vain to Owen's poetry for an account of the 'exultation' he has witnessed in sharing with his comrades 'the sorrowful dark of hell', for to write about this would be to misrepresent the war and undermine the terribleness of what was being suffered in its name:

> You shall not hear their mirth:
> You shall not come to think them well content
> By any jest of mine. These men are worth
> Your tears. You are not worth their merriment.

There is no evidence to suggest that this last verse was aimed as a direct criticism against Graves's optimism or cheerfulness - and

no evidence to suggest he interpreted it as such - but the criticism of Graves's method is implicit and is reinforced by the fact that in an earlier draft the poem opened with a quotation from Barbusse's *Under Fire*: 'If there be a bright side to war, it is a crime to show it'[89]. At Craiglockhart Owen was under the poetic tutelage of Sassoon, and Sassoon strongly disapproved of Graves's 'spirit above wars' tone, which was the same 'unmuffled gaiety' and 'vivacity' of Graves's character which Gosse had predicted in 1914 would not be 'subdued' by war.

'The Cuirassiers of the Frontier' and social alienation

'The Cuirassiers of the Frontier', written almost twenty years after the end of the war, is one of a group of 'valedictory' poems which make up Graves's angry 'goodbye' to what he saw as the 'all that' rottenness of English society in the late twenties, but it remains essentially a war poem. Indeed, it is one of a handful of truly successful war poems by Graves and the only one - apart from the late rediscovery, 'Armistice Day, 1918' - to survive as part of the personal canon to be published in the 'definitive' *Collected Poems 1975*. The image of regiment in 'Cuirassiers of the Frontier' is of a community of many different types of men brought together through necessity and united, with almost religious intensity, by a shared suffering and a common aim. The poem opens with a statement of identity. The Cuirassiers are a

motley collection, brought from disparate tribes and countries to serve in the Roman army of the late empire. This was a time when, as Henry Chadwick has written, 'the barbarian domination made people assertive about Romanitas'[90]. The barbarians of the poem, however, are confident they have earned the entitlement to bear the proud name of Roman through the 'sacrament' they have made - just as Graves, the 'rotten outsider', or the 'slovenly' recruits of 'The Legion', had earned the proud titles of fusilier and legionnaire.

> Goths, Vandals, Huns, Isaurian mountaineers,
> Made Roman by our Roman sacrament,
> We can know little (as we care little)
> Of the Metropolis: her candled churches,
> Her white-gowned pederastic senators,
> The cut-throat factions of her Hippodrome,
> The eunuchs of her draped saloons.

The even balance of lines 2 and 3, in which the second half of each line repeats the key words of the first half, confirms the confidence the cuirassiers have in their identity and establishes a tone of authority: these are people who are in no doubt as to who they are or what they think. The balance is sustained within the rhythm by a heavy dependence on caesura, which reinforces the poem as a dialectic between the values of two different, entirely opposite worlds: the remote encampment of cuirassiers in the outer reaches of a crumbling empire, and the corrupt city at its

heart. The dichotomy between the life of front-line troops fighting an imperial war on foreign territory, and the comfortable decadence of life back home, made a permanent impression on Graves during the war. By 1917, he tells us, he felt more or less alienated from his family, found the 'war madness' prevalent in England to be 'shameful' and felt that despite his poor health and despite the awfulness of war, the 'best place' for him was 'back in France' where his proper function was 'not to kill Germans... but to make things easier for the men under [his] command'[91].

Seven worksheets of this poem exist, showing the progress of its creation through four separate drafts. Two are holograph drafts, and there are two heavily annotated typescripts; in addition there is one holograph page containing a draft of the final verse, which I propose is part of the fourth draft[92]. Working backwards from the published poem it has been possible to arrange these drafts in order of composition (See Appendix 1). The first draft, entitled 'The Cataphracts', begins with four lines (crossed out on the manuscript) which give a clear indication that the poet's attitude to 'non-combatants' is the starting point, and the central theme, of the poem:

> Caring ~~less~~ nothing, if we are true soldiers
> For the home altars smoking and the bustle
> Of the white-gowned non-combatants.
> Men, women, children in the public square.

Although these lines are omitted in the published version, the cuirassier poet's disdain for civilians is retained in his contemptuous dismissal of the clergy and the politicians, as well as both high and low society:

> her [the Metropolis's] candled churches,
> Her white-gowned pederastic senators,
> The cut-throat factions of her Hippodrome,
> The eunuchs of her draped saloons.

At the Frontier, by contrast to this world of luxury and decadence, life has been reduced to essentials, there are no expectations beyond what is needed to survive and priorities are those of the dedicated soldier:

> Beans for the pot, fodder for horses,
> And Roman arms. Enough. He who among us...

The abruptness of this line, halted emphatically before and then again at the half-line, establishes the heroic virtues of the soldier, with his asceticism and rigorous self-restraint, as morally superior to the citizens' comfort and corruption. The second half of the line leads off on an entirely different note, into a lyrical celebration of comradely love. To gain this love does not depend on who you are or where you come from, but on whether or not you possess and exercise heroic virtue:

> He who among us

> At full gallop, the bowstring to his ear,
> Lets drive his heavy arrows, to sink
> Stinging through Persian corslets damascened,
> Then follows with his lance - he has our love.

This, it is clear, is no pacifist poem, nor does it evoke pity for the suffering of soldiers on either side; the cuirassiers have no self-doubt, they do not question whether the cause is right but simply do their duty according to orders - though 'damascened' suggests a contempt for an enemy whose armour is decorative and elegant. Luxury belongs to the metropolis, part of a value system irrelevant on the battlefield, where all that counts is life or death. The purity of the platonic love between soldiers, set against the prurience of the pederasts and eunuchs, shows not just the geographical but the moral isolation of the cuirassiers, and the final image is one of desperation as they continue 'watchful on the rampart' to defend an empire they despise. They have no political system they can believe in, nor any religious faith to sustain them; they are committed to no cause and are not concerned with issues of right or wrong. Their only consolation is the love between comrades and an awareness that in the performance of heroic virtue they are, despite their hopelessness and despair, nobler than the true-born Romans whom they, who are only 'made Roman', sacrifice their own lives to defend:

> We, not the City, are the Empire's soul:
> A rotten tree lives only in its rind.

This, the epigrammatic resolution of the poem's 'argument', appears only in the fourth and fifth manuscript drafts. The ending of the poem was clearly problematic for Graves: the manuscripts are heavily scored and annotated with numerous possible variations, until he finally decided on the neatness of a return to the comparison between frontier and metropolis which begins the poem. The first version of these lines on the manuscript page attached to the fourth draft, cites the 'senate' as the opposite of the military camp, but this was struck through, presumably because it was a too narrowly political image, while the second notion of 'people' lacked both the geographical specific required to sustain the topographical image, and the institutional quality necessary for it to stand as an ideological emblem of empire:

> We, not the ~~Senate~~ ~~people~~ City, are the Empire's soul...

In the first three drafts the verse had ended on an entirely different note, with an image of despair and suicide:

> So the three-obol whores
> Shut in the Sacred Castle of Repentance
> Leaped from the towers in ~~primitive~~ absurd pride.

The 'Castle of Repentance', which in the third draft becomes 'Christian' rather than 'Sacred', figures in *Count Belisarius* as having been built by Justinian's wife Theodora at Hieron[93]. It

was here that Belisarius's wife Antonina, who like Theodora herself had been a whore before she became a Christian, is confined at the end of the novel, when Belisarius falls from favour. The 'three-obol whores' of the poem presumably leap from the tower because they refuse to humble themselves and repent. The whores are, like the barbarian cuirassiers, social outsiders, and the fact that they only charge three obols (half a drachma) for their services presumably means that they also share their poverty (in the third draft the words 'poor drab whores' are written in the margin and struck through). The whores also stand for a rejection of the Christian notion of repentance, choosing to die to preserve their 'pride', which for the Christian is not a virtue as it is for the soldier, but the first of the seven deadly sins. However, the narrator clearly finds the comparison an unsatisfactory one even as an irony, for he undermines their 'pride' by qualifying it in the first draft as 'primitive', which is replaced by 'absurd', itself struck out in favour of 'comic' until finally the poet settles on the cliché 'tattered' in the fourth draft, before scoring out all three lines. Their pride is 'primitive' because it was a virtue of the ancient pagan world and has no place in modern Christian Rome; that this defiance of the new religious value system is the chief significance of the image of the whores is suggested by the lines added to the final draft after the whores passage was omitted:

That we ~~are~~ continue ~~faithful in the Emperor's service~~ watchful ~~at~~
~~our post on these walls~~ on the rampart
Concerns no priest. ~~The Our~~ A gaping silken dragon,
Puffed by the wind, suffices us for God.

For the cuirassiers, the Christian Church is 'Peter's Church', but Peter is despised as a 'coward' (first draft) for having failed to defend Christ from arrest by the temple guard, as well as for then betraying his Lord and 'breaking his sacrament'. For such action among the cuirassiers 'the penalty is death by stoning, / Not to be made a bishop'. They scorn the Christian lack of soldierly virtues such as courage, pride and refusal to surrender, and conclude that the value system of the Christian Church is part of the corruption and decadence of the City:

In Peter's Church there is no faith nor truth,
Nor justice anywhere in palace or court.
(Final draft)

As well as being Graves's most eloquent celebration of the courage and comradeship of his fellow soldiers, 'The Cuirassiers of the Frontier' points to the origin of Graves's later sense of alienation. As a young man Graves left his home to fight in a foreign land, in the company of other young men whose shared fate brought them together with an intensity which was to have a lasting effect on him. Part of the heavy price he and others paid for this comradeship was a distancing from the people he had left behind - not only his family, but the whole of the civilian

population. He no longer felt happy or comfortable at home, and while on leave yearned to be abroad again in the company of his fellow exiles. It is significant that when he was finally recovered sufficiently to confront and rationalise his experiences in a sustained and coherent fashion, by writing *Goodbye To All That*, his memoirs of the war were combined with a rejection of English society. Immediately after he had written the book he went abroad, resolved 'never to make England [his] home again'[94], thus finally abandoning, as he then thought, the 'rotten tree' to find a lonely but virtuous existence at a distant frontier.

War and Graves's concept of the poet

The pride Graves felt during the war at belonging to a special group of men set apart from the rest of society was to have implications for the poetry he was to write after 1918. In the 1965 Oxford lecture referred to above, he equated the heroic virtue of the soldier with poetic virtue and went on to describe his single-minded determination after the war to become what he was later to call 'a poet in more than the literary sense':

> I swore a poetic oath never again to be anyone's servant but my own; and gradually grew more and more obsessed by poetic principle. Its sorrows and distresses proved in their way as acute as my war-time ones. The pride of 'bearing it

> out even to the edge of doom' that sustains a soldier in the field, governs a poet's service to the Muse. It is not masochism, or even stupidity, but a determination that the story shall end gloriously: a willingness to risk all wounds and hardships, to die weapon in hand. For a poet this defiance is, of course, metaphorical: death means giving in to dead forces, dead routines of action and thought.[95]

Graves adhered strongly to a romantic view of the poet as a person with mysterious special qualities, set apart from his fellow men and driven by an obsessional, inspirational force[96]. This view made him fiercely jealous of the title of poet, and in later years he was to emphasise the extra-literary qualities required, allowing 'the title of poet' to all 'who think poetically', so that 'one may be a poet, in a sense, without ever writing a line'[97]. A sense of the moral superiority of poets permeates Graves's writing, and when a poet disgraced his profession, in his eyes, he denied him the title. The most extreme example of this attitude is encapsulated in a letter to T. S. Eliot, in which he refused to sign a plea for clemency on behalf of Ezra Pound who was awaiting trial for treason in the United States. Eliot's petition to the Supreme Court on Pound's behalf made no reference to Pound's guilt or innocence, but simply affirmed the importance of Pound's contribution to literature and stated that his position as a poet was of 'the highest worth and dignity'[98]. Graves's reply, which reiterates his view of poets as forming a sort of spiritual freemasonry, was tantamount to a court-martialling of Pound:

> I agree that poets should stick together in the most masonic way, and recall that Milton though he had a low opinion of Davenant did rescue him from the gallows because he was a poet: a compliment that Davenant afterwards returned. But since 1911 when I first read Pound in Harriet Monro's Poetry magazine; and since 1922 when I met him for the first and last time at All Souls in T. E. Lawrence's rooms, I could never regard him as a poet and have consistently denied him the title.[99]

The most lyrical description of what Graves has called the poet's 'service'[100] - a word which has a weighty significance in this context because it has both religious and military connotations - is 'The White Goddess', written in 1946. This is a poem which clearly derives its imagery from Graves's war experiences and his war poems: a small group of men physically and morally set apart from the rest of society, proud of their endurance in a wild and barren landscape, bound together by a common idealism, courageous and determined to 'bear it out even to the edge of doom', scorning those who stay behind at home while accepting their own fate as hopeless. These images which Graves had brought away from the Somme are here distilled into a metaphor for poetic creation:

> ...In scorn of which we sailed to find her
> In distant regions likeliest to hold her...
>
> It was a virtue not to stay,

> To go our headstrong and heroic way
> Seeking her out at the volcano's head,
> Among pack ice, or where the track had faded...

This dramatization of the 'true poet's' dedication to poetic principle is a continuation of Graves's idealistic pride in regiment as well as of his dreams of escape. The imagery of 'The White Goddess' is particularly reminiscent of the dreams of retreating to 'the rain-blown hill' with the ghost of Sorley, in 'Sorley's Weather', or of escaping to the 'desolate hills' of Meirion with Sassoon in 'Familiar Letter'. In each instance the poet seeks salvation by withdrawing from the world of men, alone except for the company of a fellow poet. This desire for escape, withdrawal, isolation and exile coloured both Graves's life and work after 1917, and undoubtedly derives from the trauma of his experiences on the Western Front.

Just as regimental pride and comradely love were accompanied by a separation from and disdain for civilians, for those who were not part of the special group, as a poet Graves became separated, at least in his own mind, from those of his readers who were not poets. In France he had written poetry with his fellow poets and his fellow soldiers clearly in mind as 'the reader over his shoulder'[101]. This was not possible after the war. He retired from the regiment and grew apart from his poet friends, and as he lost this clear view of his imagined audience a period of confusion

set in. He even resorted for a while to trying to write commercially popular verse for mass consumption[102]. His settled attitude to his readers, however, was in the thirties to become one of condescension, as non-poets began to assume the same status in his mind as civilians had in 1917. At the Oxford lecture already referred to, he warned his undergraduate audience that poets were surrounded by 'the walking dead'[103], by which he meant all those 'geared to the industrial machine', as he puts it in *The White Goddess*[104]. In the foreword to *Poems 1938-1945* the non-poet is dismissed because, like a civilian, he cannot be expected to appreciate the arcane mysteries which by definition he is barred from understanding:

> I write poems for poets, and satires or grotesques for wits. For people in general I write prose, and am content that they should be unaware that I do anything else. To write poems for other than poets is wasteful.

In *Goodbye To All That* Graves wrote that having a father for a poet saved him 'from any false reverence for poets'[105]. That may have been so with regard to poets as personalities, but 'reverence', false or not, exactly describes his attitude to poetry and to the idea of the poet in *The White Goddess*. One result of this attitude is that his life was marked by a recurrent fear that he would lose the inspiration which earned him membership of this élite corps. He was reluctant to seek a medical cure of his neurasthenia after the war because he thought that without this

trauma to draw on his poetry would degenerate. Similarly, the latter half of his life was dominated by an attempt to maintain his inspiration, or what he called the poet's 'gift of certitude'[106], by always being romantically in love.

Membership of 'special groups'

Graves had a strong need to feel he belonged to a special group, a select band isolated from the common run of humanity because of its idealism and special virtues. He would seem to have wanted to isolate himself from the rest of society, both physically and morally, and membership of these special groups reassured him that he was not one of the 'crowd', which he despised[107]. This is a major theme in the poetry of the late twenties and thirties, in poems such as 'The Legs' and 'The Fallen Tower of Siloam'. It became a driving force in his life during the painful attempts as a schoolboy volunteer to earn his place in the regiment, and his view of poetry and poets is dominated by this psychological need. Just as he fought on in the war only for the sake of his comrades in the regiment, so he sustained his poetic vocation by only writing poetry for poets.

It was relatively late in life that Graves sought membership of a third such special group, another form of spiritual freemasonry, which develops the pattern first established during the war. This special group was a branch of Sufism as defined by Idries Shah.

Being a Sufi, as Graves saw it, was to be 'in the world but not of it'[108], and seemed to offer a similar idealism to that he had attached to being a fusilier or a poet: Sufis possessed another unsurpassed historical tradition, a self-proclaimed high-ground, as well as a shared mystery from which non-initiates were excluded, while becoming a Sufi was dependent on the individual's possession of virtue, knowledge and love. Graves found in Shah's writing a reinforcement of his own view that to be a poet 'in more than the literary sense' entailed existence on a heightened spiritual plane. He wrote the Introduction to the first edition of Shah's *The Sufis*, in which he declared an excited sympathy with and honorary membership of this 'ancient spiritual freemasonry whose origins have never been traced or dated'[109]. Sufism, as described here by Graves, is, like 'Muse poetry', a 'secret lore' possessed only by those with certain special qualities, in which 'enlightenment' is achieved by suffering the vicissitudes of love:

> Enlightenment comes with love - love in the poetic sense of perfect devotion to a Muse...[110]

The conclusion of this rather idiosyncratic essay of the sixties is that by devotedly pursuing the path of a true or dedicated poet, Graves had been a Sufi without realising it:

> The poets were the chief disseminators of Sufi thought, earned the same reverence as did the *ollamhs*, or master

> poets, of early medieval Ireland, and used a similar secret language of metaphorical reference and verbal cipher. Nizami the Persian Sufi writes: 'Under the poet's tongue lies the key of the treasury'.[111]

'Armistice Day, 1918'

'Armistice Day, 1918' first appeared in 1967, though it had been written, in a different version, between the Armistice and the end of November 1918[112]. Its delayed publication is perhaps the reason for it having been overlooked by war poetry anthologists, for it is a more poignant and more complex colophon to the war than Sassoon's famous 'Everyone Sang'. When the end of the war was declared, Graves eschewed any public celebrations and avoided the Armistice 'hysteria'; instead he went out 'alone along the dyke above the marshes of Rhuddlan (an ancient battle-field, the Flodden of Wales) cursing and sobbing and thinking of the dead'[113]. His vivid descriptions of public celebration in the poem are, therefore, presumably based on second-hand accounts, while his solitary retreat into a bleak and inhospitable wilderness emphasises his sense of alienation from society as a whole and recalls the imagery of a number of poems, especially his most important poem about recovery from the war, 'Rocky Acres'. In Graves's description of Armistice Day, the revelry and rejoicing of the crowd is presented ironically: the flags they wave are the same flags as were waved in the excited rush of the now

discredited patriotism at the beginning of the war, while the gently understated silence of 'the armless and legless and sightless' recalls the bitter irony of Sassoon's 'Does it Matter?'. 'Armistice Day, 1918' is cynical about the moral reliability of the celebrating crowd of civilians who are still oblivious to the reality of what soldiers suffered in their name, and ignorant of the heavy price paid for the German guns they jokingly toss into the river. It is also resentful at the lack of remorse or grief for 'the boys who were killed in the trenches' who are now so easily forgotten by all except the poet who remembers them 'left... stretched out on their pallets of mud'. Graves's Armistice Day crowd consists of guilty and unrepentant non-combatants whom he condemns for not having learned any historical lesson from the recent war and for still being capable of starting another war:

> When the days of rejoicing are over,
> When the flags are stowed safely away,
> They will dream of another wild 'War to End Wars'
> And another wild Armistice day.

The care these civilians take of their flags - they will put them 'safely' away so they will be ready for whenever they need to wave another generation of young men off to fight - is ironically compared to their lack of thought for the safety of the men who will be called on to sacrifice their lives for this 'dream'. To Graves it seemed that nothing had been learned from the war which would prevent such violence and suffering from happening

again, and that his comrades had therefore died in vain. They had fought to defend a thoughtless crowd of flag-wavers who have forgotten them and who are already prepared to embark on another war. The disdain for this crowd is considerably toned down in the published version of the poem, compared to an early draft sent to Edward Marsh on November 28, 1918; in this more vigorous version Graves rages with unrestrained contempt against the civilians who he feels have no right to celebrate:

> O those are the fresh of the city,
> The thoughtless and ignorant scum
> Who hang out the bunting when war is let loose
> And for victory bang on a drum.[114]

In the published version this verse is omitted entirely. The poem as published is a more thoughtful and coherent statement against war than the manuscript version, but the consequent loss of tension and immediacy is to be regretted.

Evasion in early retrospective poems

Between 1918 and 1920 Graves wrote only ten poems dealing directly with the war, which he brought together under the title 'Retrospective', in *Country Sentiment*. Carter refers to these 'wartime legacies' as largely 'straightforward autobiographical

reminiscences'[115]. I would suggest, however, that one needs to approach this group of poems rather more cautiously, for as autobiography they are predominantly fictional, and only revealing when not taken at their face value. The lack of personal authenticity in the poems is reflected in their style: for such a small group of poems, written within the space of about a year and all on the same subject, they employ an extraordinarily disparate range of styles, which suggests a lack of coherence or even confusion in Graves's thinking on the war. The only poem to express the same degree of anger as 'Armistice Day' is 'The Leveller', and the relative success of this poem compared to the others of the group is due to the acidic irony in the final quatrain which is an accomplished parody of Sassoon:

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

This is wholly unlike Graves's own poetic voice, and as his letter to Sassoon of July 9th, 1918 shows, it was written as a defence against Sassoon's attacks on Graves's cheerfulness:

> As for my not 'writing deeply' blast you, you old croaking corbie aren't I allowed for the honour of the Regiment to balance your abysmal croakings with my feather top rhymes and songs? And I have written croakingly too lately but I

> haven't sent you specimens because I think it's bad taste... .[116]

'The Leveller' lacks the cutting edge of Sassoon's satires, however, because whereas Sassoon's barbs are largely aimed at 'scarlet Majors at the base' and other straw targets, Graves's Sergeant Smith is a decent man doing his best to protect people's feelings, and is as much a victim of circumstance as the soldiers under his command. The poem's irony is of course directed against the circumstance rather than the man, but the cynicism of the poet is undermined by Smith's essentially heroic attitude. Perhaps in awareness of this contradiction, Graves added a sixth verse when the poem was republished in *Poems 1914-1926*, giving Smith's speech. Rather than complete the poem, however, it marks its descent into the bathos which Graves had disapproved of in Sassoon's work[117], and although the sense of irony lingers, as a tool for criticising the war it is blunted by sentiment and ambiguity:

> 'He died a hero's death: and we
> His comrades of 'A' Company
> Deeply regret his death; we shall
> All deeply miss so true a pal.'

The other poems of this group, with the exception of 'Jests of the Clock', are also unusually imitative, either of the elder Georgians, especially de la Mare and Masefield, or of Graves's

most treasured early model, John Skelton[118]. The use of Skeltonics in 'A Rhyme of Friends', however, produces a disastrous mismatch of style and content. The vigour and brio of Skelton's verse makes it an inappropriate vehicle for Graves's anti-war sentiment, rather as if a carnival float had been commandeered for use as a hearse:

> Listen now this time
> Shortly to my rhyme
> That herewith starts
> About certain kind hearts
> In those stricken parts
> That lie behind Calais...
> Dwellers by the banks
> Of mournful Somme...

The confusion between the emotion and the mode of expression reflect Graves's bewildered, literally 'shell-shocked', state of mind, particularly when it came to the subject of his experiences in France. The poem, through 81 lines, becomes a nostalgic tribute to a number of French civilians, the poet's 'friends' who 'smoothed away care / When life was hard to bear'. The reality of Graves's feelings during his long period in billets in various parts of the Pas-de-Calais is the exact opposite of that suggested in 'A Rhyme of Friends'. He developed, along with many of his comrades, an intense dislike of French civilians in general and later he commented ruefully in *Goodbye To All That* on the dishonesty of the poem:

> I cannot think how I came to put so many lies in it - I even said that old Adelphine Heu of Annezin gave me a painted china plate, and that her pride was hurt when I offered to pay her. The truth is that I bought the plate from her for about fifteen shillings and that I never got it from her. Adelphine's daughter-in-law would not allow her to give it up, claiming it as her own, and I never got my money back from Adelphine. This is only one of many of my early poems that contain falsities for public delectation.[119]

The 'revisionist' personal history of these poems is part of the escapism predominant in all the *Country Sentiment* poems. The 'feather top rhymes and songs' were part of the same attempt to avoid confronting his true mental state of acute depression and nervous disorder. In both the escapist poetry and many of the retrospective war poems, Graves denies this deep unhappiness by persistent light-heartedness; he evades truth and reality by a 'digression towards wistfulness'[120].

'Recalling War'

The traumatic memory of the war experience was largely exorcised in the process of writing his prose memoirs ten years later[121]. 'Recalling War', written in 1935, is the poetic sequel to *Goodbye To All That* and reconsiders the war with a detachment

unprecedented in Graves's verse, which makes it his most comprehensive and coherent statement on the war. It is one of the most successful of all poems to emerge from direct experience of the First World War and can stand comparison with the best work of Owen and Rosenberg. Despite this, Graves suppressed it along with his other war poems and it remained absent from any collection of his work until reinstated in the revised Penguin selection of 1986.

'Recalling War' is both a reflection on the causes and effects of the Great War, which has now assumed 'the nature look of time', and a meditation on war in general; it is a response not just to past experience but to the widespread sense of expectancy prevalent in Europe, the fear that another war more terrible even than the last would soon break out to destroy the short-lived peace. Graves wrote the poem in Spain, then moving towards civil war, and it is as much a poem of anticipation and foreboding as it is of historical reflection and remembrance, expressing the concerns of the mid-thirties as well as of 1914.

'Recalling War' begins as an attempt by the poet to understand the nature and the causes of war. He sees it as part of a general irrationality in human behaviour and thus dismisses any merely political explanation:

> What, then, was war? No mere discord of flags

> But an infection of the common sky
> That sagged ominously upon the earth
> Even when the season was the airiest May.
> Down pressed the sky and we, oppressed, thrust out
> Boastful tongue, clenched fist and valiant yard.
> Natural infirmities were out of mode,
> For Death was young again: patron alone
> Of healthy dying, premature fate-spasm.

The image of man responding to a sense of existential oppression with his courageous phallus is of course an ironic comment on the sexual nature of aggression and violence; but it is also a sad admission of the moral weakness of a society driven to fight itself by what Graves called, in *But It Still Goes On*, the 'ineradicable instinct' of a 'crowd' governed by primitive and romantic impulses[122]. War is seen in this poem as something more uncontrollable and therefore more frightening than the mere political incompetences belaboured by Sassoon in his poetry. Instead it is a bewildering tragedy caused by man's moral, spiritual and intellectual inadequacies, an inevitable and endless cycle of violence brought about by human nature's inability to reform itself. For the poet, the experience of war has given the lie to the notion of progress in which previous generations had placed their faith:

> War was return of earth to ugly earth,
> War was foundering of sublimities,
> Extinction of each happy art and faith
> By which the world had still kept head in air...

The spiritual yearnings of civilisation, the struggle to achieve the abstract 'sublimities' of the mind and soul ('art and faith') are handicapped by the animal side of man's nature. This is suggested by a recurrent physicality in the poem's imagery, which dwells on limbs, wounds, skin. Man at war becomes 'all flesh', naked, with none of the clothes which civilise him and conceal his essential animality, nor has he any desire to conceal this nakedness, as he exposes himself in proud defiance and 'thrusts out' his 'valiant yard'.

War is an acceptance of this animality, the consequences of which are the abdication of thought by the group mind and an indulgence in emotional excess:

> Sick with delight
> At life's discovered transitoriness,
> Our youth became all-flesh and waived the mind.
> Never was such antiqueness of romance,
> Such tasteless honey oozing from the heart.

There is in 'tasteless honey' perhaps a sardonic comment on the sentimentality of much of Graves's own war poetry, but in a minor revision in *Collected Poems 1914-1947* 'tasteless' was substituted by its exact opposite, 'tasty', which suggests nostalgia for the comradely love, the intense 'bond' which developed as a result of shared endurance of hardship and a knowledge of

essential 'importances' - here evoked in language which recalls 'The Cuirassiers of the Frontier':

> And old importances came swimming back -
> Wine, meat, log-fires, a roof over the head,
> A weapon at the thigh, surgeons at call.
> Even there was a use again for God -
> A word of rage in lack of meat, wine, fire,
> In ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning.

Like Auden's 'Spain', written two years later, 'Recalling War' treats the war in terms which are more psychological than political, and is as much concerned with time, or 'history', as it is with war itself. The first stanza negates in literal terms the proverbial belief in 'time' as the healer of all wounds. The actual wounds sustained by Graves and his comrades are too severe to be healed. Time is not curative but it can help to deaden the pain: the 'blinded man' is still blind, the men with only one arm or one leg cannot grow new ones, but they have learned to come to terms with their disabilities, they have learned to adapt and forget. Occasionally, however, an ache returns to remind the sufferer of original pain:

> Entrance and exit wounds are silvered clean,
> The track aches only when the rain reminds...

'Track' suggests Graves's own wound sustained in France, as the 'track' of a piece of shrapnel passed cleanly through his body, creating 'entrance and exit wounds' in his back and chest.

Time and nature are able to reabsorb catastrophe into the landscape, and even a world war, if far enough distant, can assume 'the nature look of time'. Time, however, is cyclical; as it passes it may be curative, or at least anaesthetise suffering, but in the process it is also bringing ever nearer a new 'infection', which like Auden's 'fever' is the result not of some mysterious supernatural force, but of man's own moral and political decisions, as 'learnedly the future we devote / To yet more boastful visions of despair'.

Carter considers 'Recalling War' to be Graves's 'finest utterance'[123], and although his comparisons with Shakespeare, Keats, Yeats and even Picasso are perhaps over-enthusiastic, he is surely correct to attribute to the poem 'something of that impersonality traditionally associated with great art'. It is a political poem, inasmuch as it is about the motives which determine the course of 'history', but it maintains an ambivalence to war throughout, and concerns itself instead with the ability, or inability, of man to control his own life by the moral decisions he makes. Having endured the war, the poet no longer believes in choice, only duty, which is the 'duty to run mad' of a humanity condemned by a self-destructiveness inherent in the duality of its

nature. The world can try to keep its head in the air by 'protesting logic or protesting love', but these are 'sublimities' which are doomed to 'founder' as 'earth' must return to 'ugly earth'. This is an inescapable reality, for the instincts which draw man to the abstractions of 'art and faith' are countered by his primitive and animalistic instinct to fight, which is the 'delight' offered by becoming 'all-flesh' and waiving the mind.

NOTES

1. 'A Boy in Church', 'To Robert Nichols', 'The Legion' and 'A Dedication of Three Hats'.

2. These poems were found among Edward Marsh's papers in the Berg Collection at New York Public Library, New York, and would seem to have been written in 1918. A fragment of 'Letter to S. S. from Bryn-y-Pin' was published in O'PREY-1 (Letter to Sassoon 16 July 1918, p. 97). The others are 'Night March', 'The Survivor Comes Home', and 'Poetic Injustice'.

3. Owen's 'Preface' in *Collected Poems* (Chatto and Windus, 1963), p. 31.

4. Donald Davie in the *New Statesman*, 28 August 1964, pp. 282-283.

5. RG, 'The Poets of World War II' (1941), reprinted in *The Common Asphodel*, p. 312.

6. Donald Davie in the *New Statesman*, 28 August 1964, pp. 282-283.

7. RG, *The Common Asphodel*, p. 311.

8. *Ibid*, in the 'Additional Comment (1949)' to 'The Poets of World War II', p. 312.

9. J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Cape, 1976), p. 286.

10. *Ibid*.

11. *Ibid*, p. 285.

12. Riding and Graves, *A Pamphlet Against Anthologies* (1928), p. 25.

13. *Ibid*, p. 24.

14. *Ibid*, p. 25.

15. For an account of the objections made to Robert see Janet Adam Smith's 'Note on the Reissue of the Original Edition' in *Michael Roberts' Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1982), pp. xxvi-xxix. Graves

wrote to Roberts: 'it gives us a shock to read our names in this Noah's Ark catalogue' (p. xxviii), while Riding insisted on seeing his Introduction, which she commented on in detail; Smith notes that 'many of her suggestions were taken' (p. xxix).

For an account of their objections to Yeats, and for the text of Graves's reply to Yeats's request, see MS-S, p. 250-252.

16. E. B. Osborn, ed., *The Muse In Arms: A Collection of War Poems, for the most part written in the field of action, by seamen, soldiers, and flying men who are serving, or have served, in the Great War*, ed., with an Introduction (John Murray, 1917).

17. *Ibid*, p. vii.

18. *Ibid*, p. xxi.

19. *Ibid*, p. xiv.

20. *The Common Asphodel*, p. 308.

21. *Ibid*, p. viii.

22. *Ibid*, p. xv.

23. *More Songs by the fighting men* (Erskine MacDonald, 1917). This was a sequel to the same publisher's *Soldier Poets: Songs of the fighting men*, 1916.

24. Parfitt, p. 146.

25. From the 'publisher's note', quoted in Parfitt, p. 146.

26. R. Nichols, ed., *Anthology of War Poetry 1914-1918* (Nicholson and Watson, 1943).

27. *Ibid*, p. 18.

28. *Ibid*.

29. *Ibid*, p. 98.

30. *Ibid*.

31. *Ibid*, p. 17.

32. *Ibid*, p. 26.

33. Silkin, J., ed., *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* (Penguin, 1979), p. 74.

34. *Ibid*.

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. Parfitt, p. 151.

38. Silkin, p. 15.

39. *Ibid*, p. 30.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid*, p. 31.

42. *Ibid*, p. 33.

43. D. Hibberd and J. Onions, eds., *Poetry of the Great War: An Anthology* (Macmillan, 1986).

44. *Ibid*, p. 4.

45. *Ibid*, p. 6.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid*, p. 4.

48. This would include I. Parsons, ed., *Men Who March Away* (Chatto and Windus, 1965), the section headings of which indicate a similar sense of linear progression: 'Visions of Glory; The Bitter Truth; No More Jokes; The Pity of War; The Wounded; The Dead; Aftermath'.

49. Hibberd and Onions, p. 3.

50. *Ibid*, p. 4.

51. *Ibid*, p. 5.

52. *Ibid*, p. 22

53. *Ibid*, p. 3.

54. Parfitt, p. 160.

55. RG, *Poetic Craft and Principle* (Cassell, 1965), p. 108.

56. GTAT29, p. 240.

57. *Ibid*, p. 120.

58. S. Sassoon, *Memoirs of An Infantry Officer* (Faber and Faber, 1931), pp. 106-7.

59. P. Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (OUP, 1975), p. 207.

60. *Ibid*, p. 206.

61. RPG-1, pp. 103-4.

62. GTAT29, pp. 443-444.

63. GTAT29, pp. 121, 443.

64. *Ibid*, p. 444.

65. *Ibid*, p. 446.

66. *Ibid*, pp. 358-359.

67. For an account of his family's reaction to publication of *Goodbye To All That* see RPG-2, p. 131, and Alfred Perceval Graves (Graves's father) *To Return To All That* (Cape, 1930). For Sassoon's hostile reaction, see O'PREY-1, pp. 219-233. For hostile public reaction see Graves's 'Postscript to *Goodbye To All That*' in *But It Still Goes On*, pp. 13-56.

68. Fussell, Preface, p. ix.

69. Parfitt, p. 126.

70. For Graves's account of his action see GTAT29, pp. 320-325, which includes the text of Sassoon's 'A Soldier's Declaration', a statement made to his commanding officer setting out his reasons for his decision.

71. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 12 July 1917, p. 77.

72 GTAT29, p. 288.

73. O'PREY-1, letter to Sassoon 13 September 1917, p. 82.

74. *Ibid*, letter to Sassoon 27 October 1917, p. 85.

75. *Ibid*, p. 86.

76. *Ibid*, letter to Sassoon 11 January 1918, p. 91 and GTAT29, p. 335.

77. O'PREY-1, letter to Sassoon 27 October 1917, p. 85 and GTAT29, p. 339.

78. O'PREY-1, letter to Sassoon No Date [November 1917], p. 87.

79. GTAT29, p. 330.

80. Parfitt, p. 125.

81. See the letters to Sassoon after 11 January 1918 (O'PREY-1, pp. 91). Especially 9 July 1918 ('I say I'm awfully sorry I'm such a swine to be happy'), pp. 95-99 and 26 August ('I can't write otherwise than I am now except with hypocrisy for I am bloody happy and bloody young (with only very occasional lapses) and passionate anger is most ungrateful').

82. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 12 July 1917, p. 77.

83. Text in *Wilfred Owen Collected Letters*, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 595-596.

84. The poem might have been less cold-blooded if Graves himself had actually had a Lucasta to say goodbye to. It was written before he fell in love with Nancy Nicholson in October 1917, and apart from an undeclared crush on one of his nurses he had until then no experience of falling in love with a woman. See O'PREY-1, p. 89, letter to Robert Nichols, no date [November 1917].

85. *The Common Asphodel*, p. 309: 'The character of British war poetry changed again in 1917, though what may be called the rank-and-file of war poets kept to the existing formulas. One of the two chief reasons for this was a realization by the more intelligent poets that the General Staff were sacrificing hundreds of thousands of lives in nightmare attacks which had no military justification; the other was the Conscription Act. Hitherto we had all been volunteers, and this had somehow been a consolation for the frightful conditions which trench warfare now implied. To be cannon-fodder was dispiriting enough: to have perhaps unwilling conscripts foisted on our company was worse still'. In GTAT29, p. 123, Graves notes that 'the regiment (that is, consensus of opinion in the two line battalions) only tentatively accepted the new-army battalions one by one as they proved themselves worthy, by service in the field. The territorials it never accepted, disowning them contemptuously as "dog-shooters"'.

86. *Wilfred Owen Collected Letters*, p. 511.

87. *Ibid*, p. 526.

88. *Ibid*, p. 596.

89. Hibberd and Onions, *Poetry of the Great War*, p. 205.

90. In *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, ed. by J. Boardman, J. Griffin and O. Murray (OUP, 1986), p. 811.

91. GTAT29, p. 290.

92. In the Special Collection at the State University of Buffalo, New York.

93. RG, *Count Belisarius*, p. 554.

94. GTAT57, p. 279.

95. RG, *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 109.

96. Graves describes his own 'overriding poetic obsession' in GTAT29, p. 282, and in *The White Goddess*, pp. 14-15 and p. 17.

97. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 7.

98. See O'PREY-1, p. 341.

99. *Ibid*.

100. See particularly *The White Goddess*, p. 15, where Graves insists that 'she demands either whole-time service or none at all'.

101. 'To the Reader over My Shoulder' was the title of a poem in *Ten Poems More* (1930) and *The Reader Over Your Shoulder* the title of his 'Handbook for Writers of English Prose' written in collaboration with Alan Hodge (1943).

102. See O'PREY-1, p. 101, letter to Sassoon 26 August 1918, stating he 'can't afford to stop [writing] in these penurious days and anyhow my "antique silk and flower brocade" continue to please the seventeen-year-old girls and other romantics for whom they are intended: and why not?'. These were the poems of *Country Sentiment*. For further discussion of Graves's commercial ambition in his poems see Chapter Three below.

103. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 109.

104. *The White Goddess*, p. 14.

105. GTAT29, p. 23.

106. RG, *Mammon and The Black Goddess*, p. 67

107. See *But It Still Goes On*, pp. 43 and 293, for Graves's hostility to the sense of 'crowd', discussed further in Chapter Six below.

108. Graves's Introduction to Idries Shah *The Sufis* (Doubleday, 1964), p. x.

109. *Ibid*, p. ix.

110. *Ibid*, p. x.

111. *Ibid*, p. xi.

112. The poem was originally called 'November 11th' and was included in a letter to Marsh 28 November 1918, cited by W. Graves in *Poems About War*, p. 91.

113. GTAT29, p. 342.

114. Quoted in *Poems About War*, p. 91.

115. Carter, p. 140.

116. O'PREY-1, p. 101: '"The Leveller" is as good a skit on Sassoon as "Daffodil Murderess" [*sic*] was on Masefield and equally deserved' [letter to Sassoon 26 August, 1918].

117. In December 1917 Graves wrote to Owen: 'S. S. often overdoes it: he started sparingly but it's a temptingly easy path to run down to bathos by - ' (Wilfred Owen Collected Letters, p. 596).

118. Graves first read Skelton in March 1917, and was instantly impressed by his poems, writing to Sassoon: 'I have just discovered a great poet, a chap called Skelton (1460-1525) [*sic*] of whom there's been no edition since 1843: a true Englishman and a man after my own heart; wrote beautiful doggerel nonsense and thoroughly irresponsible and delightful jingles, though "the first scholar in the land" according to Erasmus. Of him more anon.' (In O'PREY-1, p. 67, letter to Sassoon 26 March 1917).

119. GTAT29, p. 342.

120. Foreword to *Collected Poems 1938* (Cassell, 1938), p. xix.

121. Graves acknowledged this as the case in GTAT29, pp. 358-359: 'Edmund [Blunden] had war-shock as badly as myself, and we would talk each other into an almost hysterical state about the trenches. We agreed that we would not be right until we got all that talk on to paper. He was first with *Undertones of War*, published in 1928.

122. *But It Still Goes On* (1930), p. 43.

123. Carter, p. 197.

PART TWO

RECONSTRUCTION

CHAPTER THREE

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CHAPTER THREE

'ROCKY ACRES':

NEURASTHENIA AND EARLY LOVE POETRY

Decline of reputation and popularity after the war

Deprived of topicality and the automatic sympathy accorded to poetry from the trenches, Graves's popularity declined sharply in the years after 1918, despite his being perhaps the most talented of the 'soldier poets' to survive[1]. Inclusion in Marsh's annual *Georgian Poetry* anthologies had made Graves well-known, but when the series began to decline in popularity and finally ceased publication in 1922[2], Graves's name was 'forgotten again'[3]. Graves took reviews of his work seriously at this time[4], and the few that appeared of *Country Sentiment*, which was 'hardly noticed'[5], and of *The Pier Glass*, which 'was also a failure'[6] and of *Whipperginny*, were less than enthusiastic. W. R. Benet observed, with regard to *Whipperginny*, that Graves was growing 'too self-conscious about his art for the good of that art'[7], while John Middleton Murry dismissed *Country Sentiment* as 'schoolboyish and impertinent'[8]. That this 'boyishness' was part

of Graves's charm was acknowledged by Murry, but 'charm' was one thing while 'poetry is another matter'[9]. Graves's attempts to write 'ballads' had resulted in a frank 'failure' which was 'irrevocable and absolute':

> Mr Graves is, though he may not be aware of it, playing at ballads; the result is falsity... He obviously needs to be much more critical of himself when he passes outside what seems to be his natural bent; for his failures in dealing with other emotions than the pleasant thrill of rhyming are... failures not in the superficies but in the essence of poetry.[10]

In retrospect, writing in 1938, Graves acknowledged that his 'preoccupation with the physical side of poetry'[11] or the 'pleasant thrill of rhyming' as Murry put it, was a shortcoming of his work and that it had indeed been necessary for him to become 'more self-critical'[12] in order for him to develop as an artist, but from 1918 to 1925 he was to struggle in an attempt to find his true direction as a poet, making in the process a number of what he was ruefully to call 'mistakes and digressions' which detracted him from a more settled course[13].

Graves's first response to the sudden freedom offered him by the return to civilian life was to try to act out a vision of the dreams which had sustained him during the worst moments of the war,

and which feature in a number of his trench poems, from 'Over the Brazier' to the 'Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon'. Love which offered both romantic excitement and domestic security was an essential element of this dream. Graves had fallen in love with Nancy Nicholson while still deeply traumatised from shell shock and the injuries he sustained at the battle of the Somme, and he saw in their love the opportunity for emotional and mental recovery, as well as a means of achieving the domestic peace and stability that had been part of the '*après-la-guerre*' dream in 'Over the Brazier'. Their marriage in January 1918 gave him a much needed opportunity for optimism, the prospect of starting a family making it easier to convince himself that he was starting a new life, despite the persistent tendency of his old life to haunt him with images of fear and guilt[14].

When he belatedly took up his Classics Exhibition at St John's College, Oxford, in October 1919, Graves was physically disabled due to the injury to his lung, but more debilitating than this was his continued neurasthenia, which prevented a full return to normal life:

> I was very thin, very nervous, and had about four years' loss of sleep to make up. My disabilities were many; I could not use a telephone, I was sick every time I travelled on a train, and if I saw more than two new people in a single day it prevented me from sleeping.[15]

Graves sought to restore his mental stability in three ways: through his love for Nancy and their attempt to build an idyllic life together, through psychoanalysis, and through using his writing as a form of therapy. Although none of these was entirely successful on its own, the 'therapeutic' use of poetry did produce some of Graves's best work of the period and meant that his main contribution to the poetry of the First World War was to be in his account of what it meant to survive to reconstruct his life and come to terms with the traumatic memories of the experience which were still to haunt him sixty years later[16]. The fact that most anthologies of First World War poetry end at or just after the Armistice has meant that the point of view of the survivor, a significant aspect of the literature generated by the war, has been relatively neglected by them, and Graves's importance in the literary history of the war has been understated as a consequence.

The split between engagement and escapism which characterises Graves's wartime writing continued to be a major feature of his poetry into the 1920s. On the one hand he wrote an intense, tortured verse expressive of his neurasthenia, but this was interspersed with regular retreats into facile sentiment or nostalgic fantasy. In 'The God Called Poetry', written shortly after the war, Graves acknowledges the continued domination of his verse by a schizophrenic muse, which he presents as a Janus:

> Today I see he has two heads

Like Janus - calm, benignant, this;
That, grim and scowling: his beard spreads
From chin to chin: this god has power
Immeasurable at every hour:
He first taught lovers how to kiss,
He brings down sunshine after shower,
Thunder and hate are his also...

Graves's 'calm benignant' muse inspired a small body of light verse during these years which is technically accomplished and charming, but which consciously avoids truth rather than illuminates it. The best of his poetry was instead expressive of his nervous state, and he began to fear that his writing would become 'dull' and 'easy' without the neurosis that fed it[17]. He therefore resisted psychoanalysis for some time paradoxically because he thought it might cure him: if his '*Pier-Glass* haunting' ended he might lose 'the power of writing poetry', which was 'more important' to him 'than anything else'[18]. Thus it seemed to Graves at the time 'less important to be well than to be a good poet'[19]. This, he realised somewhat tardily, was a self-destructive folly which not only hindered his recovery but put unbearable strains on his marriage. It was an attitude which in another way compromised the integrity of the poetry it was designed to produce, for the inner conflict which generated his poetry was being artificially prolonged and sustained. Sisson points out that Graves had learned from Hardy the important 'principle' that the tensions which produce poetry should be 'always accidental'[20], and that his wilful continuation of his neurasthenic condition in

order to write verse displayed an 'indifference' to this principle, as well as 'a certain vanity and a certain frivolity in [his] attitude to life'[21]. In *Goodbye To All That* Graves explains that he finally came to accept the need for psychoanalysis, but instead of consulting a psychiatrist (he had a 'strong repugnance against allowing anyone to have ...power' over him) he immersed himself in the latest theories of clinical psychology with the intention of curing himself[22]. To try to be one's own analyst is itself perhaps symptomatic of an obsessive personality, particularly as Graves never saw any contradiction in the attempt but presumably saw himself as following Freud's own example. He did not reveal the conclusions of this analysis, but it did lead to his adopting a view of poetry, expressed in *On English Poetry*, *Poetic Unreason* and *The Meaning of Dreams*, as a form of therapy which has the aim of consciously resolving internal psychological or emotional conflict by drawing on the subconscious imagination, which is discussed in the next chapter.

It was not until 1921 and the poems of *Whipperginny* that, exhausted by emotional stress and his marriage suffering as a consequence, Graves rebelled against this particular form of heroic, if misguided, self-sacrifice in pursuit of art. In 'Interlude', a piece of literary self-criticism, Graves acknowledges the lack of cohesion in his work and identifies the ongoing split between engagement and avoidance, or what the poem calls 'fight or flight', as its principal weakness. Placed in

the middle of *Whipperginny*, 'The Interlude' marks a watershed in his work with the poems in the second half of the volume demonstrating a new resolve towards greater detachment and objectivity, with a consequent move away from treatments of personal emotion towards more abstract philosophy and metaphysics.

'The Interlude' proposes a correlation between financial success or, in this case failure, and artistic achievement. In the first part of the poem, the poet regrets the fact that his recent work has failed to attract public attention or admiration, evident by the poor sales of his books:

> '...What were my last Royalties?
> Reckoned in pounds, were they, or shillings,
> Or even perhaps in pence?'

The second part of the poem consists of the epigrammatic 'Epitaph on an Unfortunate Artist', which in later volumes was to appear in isolation as the rest of 'Interlude' was discarded. Unlike the first part of the poem it is written in the third person and considers the prospect of facile success which Graves feared:

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

For a brief period after the war Graves believed that he could write serious poetry which would attract a wide popular audience and thus financially support his growing family. He hoped that poems like 'Allie', 'Loving Henry' and 'Vain and Careless', wistful and fanciful idylls of rural England, would appeal to a book-buying public weary, like himself, of the realities of war and only too willing to look for an escape, as he wrote to Edmund Blunden:

> War poetry is played out I'm afraid, commercially, for another five or ten years. Rotten thing for us, but it's no good blinking at it. Country Sentiment is the most acceptable dope now, and this is the name I've given my new poems.[23]

Only a few years later Graves was to quarrel with T. S. Eliot, accusing him of 'compromising poetry' by worrying about sales of the *Criterion*[24], just as he was to hold Yeats up for ridicule for a comment by his father to Graves's own father ('Willie has found a very profitable little by-path in poetry') which, Graves maintained, exposed an opportunism and cynical commercialism characteristic of the Irishman[25]. Graves's assessment of the 'most acceptable dope' in his comment to Blunden is thus not only out of character but demonstrates the extent to which he had lost his way as a poet after the war.

'Rocky Acres' and alienation

In the war poems which dreamed of *'après-la-guerre',* the desire for escape which was a symptom of Graves's sense of disorientation, was generally expressed as a solitary retreat into a remote, barren landscape. In 'Rocky Acres', one of the first neurasthenic poems, a similar isolation is sought as the poet identifies himself with a wild, inhospitable world, the barrenness or emptiness of which attracts him because it represents an extreme simplification of life. The poem describes the rocky hill country above Harlech in north Wales, where Graves had spent the happiest moments of his childhood and to which he had retreated when on leave during the war. Although the country is not named in the poem, it is instantly recognisable from the following passage in *Goodbye To All That*, which provides an informative gloss on a poem of considerable significance in Graves's development:

> I suppose what I liked about this country (and I know no country like it) was its independence of formal nature. The passage of the seasons was hardly noticed there; the wind always seemed to be blowing and the grass always seemed to be withered and the small streams were always cold and clear, running over black stones. Sheep were the only animals about, but they were not nature, except in the lambing season; they were too close to the granite boulders covered with grey lichen that lay about everywhere. There were few trees

> except a few nut bushes, rowans, stunted oaks and thorn bushes in the valleys. The winters were always mild, so that last year's bracken and last year's heather lasted in a faded way through to the next spring. There were almost no birds except an occasional buzzard and curlews crying in the distance; and wherever we went we felt that the rocky skeleton of the hill was only an inch or two under the turf. Once, when I came home on leave from the war, I spent about a week of my ten days walking about on these hills to restore my sanity. I tried to do the same after I was wounded, but by that time the immediate horror of death was too strong for the indifference of the hills to relieve it.[26]

The principal significance of this landscape for Graves was thus its apparent independence of time: the seasons have no relevance here as they are indistinguishable from each other, while the landscape is unaffected by the passing of the years. In the poem, 'Time has never journeyed to this lost land', which is an 'immortal country', 'the first land that rose from Chaos and the Flood'. By retreating to a landscape 'independent' of the seasons and 'indifferent' to the ravages of time, the neurasthenic poet can temporarily escape the 'terror' in the 'far plains below', the time-bound valleys 'stained with blood'.

There are several ambiguities in the poet's association with the moral landscape of 'Rocky Acres' which although independent of the destructive processes of human history, is itself hostile and cruel. The poet who has been almost destroyed by violence now seems to be on the side of power and aggression, in the form of

the 'dark speck' preying on the 'small hidden things', as well as 'the proud gods' who terrorise the fat burghers of the plains:

> This is a wild land, country of my choice,
> With harsh craggy mountain, moor ample and bare.
> Seldom in these acres is heard any voice
> But voice of cold water that runs here and there
> Through rocks and lank heather growing without care.
> No mice in the heath run nor no birds cry
> For fear of the dark speck that floats in the sky.
>
> He soars and he hovers rocking on his wings,
> He scans his wide parish with a sharp eye.
> He catches the trembling of small hidden things,
> He tears them in pieces, dropping from the sky:
> Tenderness and pity the land will deny,
> Where life is but nourished from water and rock
> A hardy adventure, full of fear and shock.
>
> Time has never journeyed to this lost land,
> Crakeberries and heather bloom out of date,
> The rocks jut, the streams flow singing on either hand,
> Careless if the season be early or late.
> The skies wander overhead, now blue, now slate:
> Winter would be known by his cold cutting snow
> If June did not borrow his armour also.
>
> Yet this is my country beloved of me best,
> The first land that rose from Chaos and the Flood,
> Nursing no fat valleys for comfort and rest,
> Trampled by no hard hooves, stained with no blood.
> Bold immortal country whose hill tops have stood
> Strongholds for the proud gods when on earth they go,

Terror for fat burghers in far plains below.

The opening line emphasises that this is essentially a poem about choice. The poet's retreat to the mountain is a voluntary exile, a deliberate disassociation from the society of men below, which he describes in contemptuous terms. It is thus another poem about preferring the trenches to staying at home, in the manner of 'Cuirassiers at the Frontier', and like that poem celebrates a harsh existence reduced to the minimum essential for survival: food and water. The poet is attracted by this emptiness and becomes part of it. There is a lack of any personal involvement in this landscape, which is described without any reference to his own presence there. Inasmuch as the mountain represents a moral landscape, absence is itself open to interpretation, for it leads the poet to accept the suffering of the victims in the buzzard's daily hunt for food as inevitable. The neutrality of the uninvolved bystander, which Graves was to cultivate in poems of the 1930s, is first seen here as a possible response to the experience of life. The harsh reality of existence, the 'hardy adventure' of life, is that the buzzard survives at the expense of others and this makes any sentimental regret irrelevant. The poet witnesses the buzzard's exercise of power through violence as a fact of nature, which he observes but does not comment on. Given that the experience of war is the politically and emotionally charged subtext of this landscape description, the image of helpless prey invokes the memory of the numerous victims of misused power

and overwhelming violence who had fought alongside Graves in France. His survival could also be seen, from one point of view, as having been at their expense, but he was of course far from detached or unemotional about their deaths.

The bird is not the only symbol of power and terror in the poem, and the poet's attitude to the gods who terrorize the citizens of the valley is more sinister. While the gods are ennobled with the adjective 'proud', the citizens are described contemptuously as 'fat burghers', which makes the poet's sympathies clear. Michael Kirkham explains the poet's association with the bird of prey (which he mysteriously identifies as a vulture) and with the proud gods as an attempt to overcome his traumatic experiences:

> Evidently he is trying to overcome the terror of being a victim by identifying himself with the ruling powers that are responsible for this cruelty; and the psychological dishonesty of such a course accounts for the moral unpleasantness of the position he has adopted and for the implausibility of the triumphant tone.[27]

The logical implication of Kirkham's reading is that Graves was prepared to betray the memory of his fellow soldiers who died in battle, or at least deny solidarity with them, as the price he needed to pay for overcoming his own sense of powerlessness. Kirkham's reading depends on his assumption that the gods are 'responsible' for spilling the blood in the valleys, but this has no

basis in the text. The gods may terrorise the fat burghers, but the reader could equally assume it is the burghers themselves who are responsible for their own wars and the spilling of blood. Such an alternative reading, which seems to me more plausible, would mean that rather than 'identifying' with those he holds 'responsible', the poet is seeking revenge against them. Graves had himself suffered in the defence of these same 'fat burghers', and fought alongside friends who had died for them, only to realise - for example, in 'Armistice Day' - that they were not worth the sacrifice. Thus like the cuirassiers, Graves is disillusioned by the comfortable decadence ('comfort and rest') of the society he has fought to defend. Alienated from this society, he seeks instead a harsh but pure exile, a form of social suicide which was to become increasingly attractive to him as the decade progressed. A sense of alienation was one of the major features of Graves's neurasthenia, an alienation which derived, as we have seen, from an emotional response to non-combatants which made him prefer active service in France to staying at home in England. This sense of alienation inevitably made a full return to life in England problematic, exactly in the way that Owen had foreseen in 'Smile, Smile, Smile', an ironic late poem which faces the prospect of reconstructing life after the war with the same sense of disillusion in the future of England as felt by Graves, for 'England one by one had fled to France', which left 'not many elsewhere now, save under France'.

Unlike the other poems in *Country Sentiment*, 'Rocky Acres' makes no concession to any sense of musicality; there is instead a difficult, uncompromising series of syntactical inversions, negatives and double negatives, plus a metrical clumsiness produced by an additional half-foot on many of the lines. This extra measure almost invariably falls on a strong monosyllabic rhyme word which reinforces the sense of harshness and bareness which is being celebrated. The simplicity and economy of diction similarly suggests an absence of comfort or luxury. The poem ends, however, with a rich interplay of internal rhyme, repetition and alliteration, including another free adaptation of the complex Welsh system of alliteration, *cynghanedd*, a metrical allusion to the poem's location. The interplay between the harsh s-t-d sequence ('stained', 'stood', strongholds') and the p/b-l-d combination ('trampled', 'blood' and 'bold') creates an heroic atmosphere in which the fat burghers are diminished still further:

> Trampled by no hard hooves, stained with no blood.
> Bold immortal country whose hill tops have stood
> Strongholds...

The poems in which Graves deals most successfully with his neurasthenia are cast in dramatic form: 'Rocky Acres', 'Outlaws', 'Ghost Raddled', 'The Pier-Glass', 'Reproach', 'The Gnat' and 'Down'. In each of these, Graves either adopts a persona, sketches out a small dramatic vignette, or creates, as in the case of 'Rocky Acres', a moral landscape, all of which act as

objective correlatives to express the emotions of fear and guilt which dominated his state of mind. The subject of neurasthenia is never referred to openly or treated directly, but is instead dramatised through the use of extended metaphor. This technique has led to some confusion among critics interpreting these poems, a problem compounded by the continued ambiguity inherent in Graves's attitude both to the war and to his consequent mental illness.

Self-watchfulness: 'Outlaws'

The 'proud gods' of 'Rocky Acres' are revisited in 'Outlaws', though here they no longer live in mountain strongholds but are 'humbled' and condemned to 'lurk' in the wet woods among 'ghosts and ghouls':

> Old gods almost dead, malign,
> Starved of their ancient dues,
> Incense and fruit, fire, blood and wine
> And an unclean muse.

In their humbled state they are not to be admired and associated with, as in 'Rocky Acres'. Instead, although they are 'shrunk to mere bogey things', the poet warns that they are to be feared and avoided. Critical writing on this poem has concentrated on what

these gods represent and even the best of this writing, which as usual comes from Kirkham and Carter, is vague and uncertain as to the exact meaning of the poem. Kirkham states that the gods are an 'interesting conception', being 'forces' which have erupted from the poet's unconscious in a way which 'links the findings of psychoanalysis and anthropology'. Quite what it all means, though, Kirkham is unsure and blames the poet for failing to make his attitude to the gods clear[28]. Carter is more enthusiastic about the poem, saying that it 'goes beyond the psychological to touch upon the metaphysical', adding rather more ambitiously that it affords 'an insight into man's beginnings, his fear of the dark, the void...'[29]. Again, the nature of this 'insight' is left unstated. Both critics concentrate in their accounts on what the gods represent, but the poem reveals more when we concentrate not on the gods themselves but on the poet's reaction to them. The key to this comes in the third and fourth verses:

> Look up, else your eye must drown
> In a moving sea of black
> Between the tree-tops, upside down
> Goes the sky-track.
>
> Look up, else your feet will stray
> Towards that dim ambuscade,
> Where spider-like they catch their prey
> In nets of shade.

The sense of keeping one's independence by avoiding and remaining apart from negative forces which surround the poet, makes this poem a precursor of 'The Legs', written a decade later in which the poet states his determination not to be swayed from his chosen path through life by becoming one of the 'crowd'. It is thus a poem about self-watchfulness, and can be seen as an illustration of Proverbs 16, 17, 'he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul', with the old gods representing various fears and negative forces which distract the poet from his true self. The principal threats to Graves's soul came, as Kirkham observes, from the dark forces erupting from his own unconscious, and the 'webs of murk' surely represent more than anything the insanity that Graves feared was the inevitable end of his neurosis. 'Outlaws' is, then, a poem about his decision to try to cure himself of his neurasthenia by addressing the disturbance of his subconscious and belittling the fears and anxieties which inhibited a return to normal life - hence the insistence, which at the end becomes quite lighthearted, that these gods are not as fearful as they seem to be. The path in the poem represents sanity and normality, but it can also be seen as the poetic vocation which Graves was now committing himself to with more and more seriousness. The proud gods in this reading are 'the walking dead that surround the poetic obsessionist'[30], the anti-poetic forces which threaten to distract him from his pursuit of truth and weaken his resolve to persevere on the difficult way he has chosen.

This linkage between his sense of poetic vocation and his war experience is reinforced by the subsequent revisions made to the poem when it was republished in the various editions of the *Collected Poems*. In the 1947 collection the gods' subjects change from 'peasant, tyrant, priest' to 'warrior, tyrant, priest', which suggests more directly that these forces have derived their power over Graves as a result of his experiences in the war. In the 1959 edition, the list of subjects changed again to reflect more accurately the iconography spelled out in *The White Goddess*. Thus tyrant is replaced by 'virgin', while the 'unclean muse' is substituted by the less sinister but more puzzling 'drumming muse', which also conjures up the imagery of war, and hints further at obsessive emotions being part of the gods' domain. These revisions to 'Outlaws' provide an interesting example of how the war and his subsequent neuroses provided Graves with the imagery which could express his vision of the White Goddess, for here the influence has worked in reverse, with the imagery developed during the White Goddess period being used to revise one of the neurasthenic poems which were the seedbed of that imagery; the effect is to transform the character of the poem, giving it greater resonance and coherence.

'The Haunted House'

In 1941 Graves published a selection of fifty poems entitled *No More Ghosts*. The sense of being haunted, or 'ghost raddled', dominates the selection which ends with the title poem celebrating a new beginning for the poet after he has been finally freed from the psychological torment chronicled in a cycle of poems which span the period of neurasthenia and recovery. The 'exorcism' in 'No More Ghosts' is achieved through the combined healing powers of time and a new love. The nightmare sense of fear and guilt personified by the 'ghosts' is banished through the symbolic destruction and subsequent recycling of the patriarchal bed:

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

The implied metaphor of self as house - the dark attic a troubled mind full of the sinister mental furniture of memory - connects this poem with 'The Haunted House', which opens the sequence. This is a revised version of 'Ghost Raddled', a poem which first appeared in *Country Sentiment*. The retitling is the most material of a number of small revisions to the 1920 text, and was presumably required to emphasise the unity and coherence of the sequence. Placing 'The Haunted House' at the start of *No More*

Ghosts establishes the war as the source of the psychological trauma which the subsequent poems chronicle through its various stages. It is an embittered statement about his difficult reintegration into society, dramatized in the antagonism between the poet and his audience in the opening lines. The poet is addressed as a 'surly fellow', a bore obsessed with memories of death and suffering, who rails at his companions, whom he calls 'madmen' in 'Ghost Raddled' and 'fools' in the revised version, condemning them for their ignorance of his suffering and their reluctance to know anything about it. These fools are not identified - their anonymity is part of the mysterious haunting of the house - but the 'mystery' also draws the reader into a series of questions. Are the fools the poet's family he has returned to, or his ancestors who continue to haunt the 'patriarchal' home he has inherited? Are they memories of dead companions, soldiers who did not live long enough to realise the tragic enormity of the war? Or are they perhaps the critics and readers who have grown weary of war poetry and who now want something lighter and more amusing from their writers? The lack of definition allows each of these readings a validity in a poem which is more complex than the simple rhythm and reassuring rhyme scheme lead one to expect:

> 'Come, surly fellow, come! A song!'
> 'What, fools? Sing to you?
> Choose from the clouded tales of wrong
> And terror I bring to you:

'Of a night so torn with cries,
Honest men sleeping
Start awake with rabid eyes,
Bone-chilled, flesh creeping.

'Of spirits in the webbed room
Up above the stable,
Groans, knockings in the gloom,
The dancing table,

'Of demons in the dry well
That cheep and mutter,
Clanging of an unseen bell,
Blood choking the gutter,

'Of lust filthy past belief
Lurking unforgotten,
Unrestrainable endless grief
In breasts long rotten.

'A song? What laughter or what song
Can this house remember?
Do flowers and butterflies belong
To a blind December?'

The dramatic setting is a vaguely historical reconstruction of an oral poet's performance after a feast, but this is a poet with disturbing and therefore unwelcome songs rather than heroic ballads, who sets out to unsettle rather than amuse his audience. The influence of 'The Ancient Mariner' is clear. Graves admired Coleridge intensely and had devoured the *Biographia Literaria*

which he thought in 1922 should be the poet's bible[31], while 'The Ancient Mariner' was not only Coleridge at his best, but 'as faithful a record of the White Goddess as exists'[32]. Here, however, it is not the mariner's vision which has struck a chord with Graves, but the condition of the mariner himself, the returned veteran who talks obsessively about his terrifying experiences, about fear and death, to people who cannot imagine such suffering and who would rather not hear about it.

If 'The Haunted House' looks back to 'The Ancient Mariner', it also brings to mind a contemporary poem published in the same year, Eliot's 'Gerontion'. Although they are clearly very different in style, in a curious way they can be considered as companion pieces, not only because of a shared imagery, but because Gerontion is as obsessed with not having fought in the war as Graves's 'surly fellow' is with the fact that he did:

> I was neither at the hot gates
> Nor fought in the warm rain
> Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass
> Bitten by flies, fought.

The 'rented house' in Gerontion is not haunted, but like the house in Graves's poem it is 'decayed'. A sense of ruin pervades the poem through imagery similar to Graves's in that it emphasises dryness and the absence of any true life, suggesting spiritual as well as physical decline. In both poems a ruined house is used to

suggest social collapse, and to express disillusion in the post-war civilization which is the bitter inheritance of both those who fought in the Great War and those who did not.

'The Pier-Glass' and guilt

The metaphor of an old, large, dilapidated house is employed by Graves on several occasions as a vehicle for expressing various states of anxiety, guilt and decay. In 'The Pier Glass' such a house is the scene of a violent killing, which the murderer haunts 'continually' in the hope of finding some release from the torment of her own remorse. It is a dramatic poem in which Graves's narrative skills are evident in the evocation of an atmosphere redolent of obsessional guilt by the combination of precise description and subjective comment within the interior monologue of the disturbed narrator:

> Lost manor where I walk continually
> A ghost, while yet in woman's flesh and blood.
> Up your broad stairs mounting with outspread fingers
> And gliding steadfast down your corridors
> I come by nightly custom to this room,
> And even on sultry afternoons I come
> Drawn by a thread of time-sunk memory.
>
> Empty, unless for a huge bed of state

Shrouded with rusty curtains drooped awry
(A puppet theatre where malignant fancy
Peoples the wings with fear). At my right hand
A ravelled bell-pull hangs in readiness
To summon me from attic glooms above
Service of elder ghosts; here at my left
A sullen pier-glass cracked from side to side
Scorns to present the face as do new mirrors
With a lying flush, but shows it melancholy
And pale, as faces grow that look in mirrors.

Like 'Ghost Raddled', this poem clearly owes much to Graves's reading of nineteenth century poetry, which he was obliged to study at the time as part of the English Literature course at Oxford. The source here is not Coleridge but Tennyson's portrayal of the imprisoned maiden in 'Mariana' and 'The Lady of Shalott', which Graves adapts to express his own need for escape from a nightmare state of mind. Like 'The Lady of Shalott', the woman in 'The Pier-Glass' is trapped, and longs for escape from her prison and the companionship of 'shadows', and the central image of both poems is an enchanted mirror 'cracked from side to side':

The mirror crack'd from side to side;
'The curse is come upon me', cried
The Lady of Shalott.

Unlike the imprisoned maiden of Victorian imagination, Graves's heroine has been trapped by her own actions. She is not the victim of an external curse, the mysterious punishment of fate,

but has brought the curse on herself by killing her unfaithful lover. She is the prisoner of her own conscience, and her only opportunity for release depends on her ability to come to terms with what she has done.

As in several of the neurasthenic poems, Graves's reliance on the dramatic produces isolated passages in which complex psychological disturbance and emotional imbalance are reflected with chilling accuracy, but the poem overall is unable to proceed beyond this, and fails to achieve a satisfactory resolution. Such fragmentation is perhaps in itself a product of the very confusion and exhaustion that the poem attempts to express, but that Graves was searching for some form of resolution is suggested by the epigraph to the English edition of the 1921 volume in which 'The Pier-Glass' appeared, from Skelton's 'Speke, Parrot' (lines 190-191) - a poem Graves had discovered and delighted in during his service in France:

> This myrrour I tote in *quasi diaphunum*
> *Vel quasi speculum, in aenigmate*...[*sic*]

The mirror 'quasi diaphunum' refers to I Corinthians 13, 12, while 'tote', which is presumably an abbreviation of 'total', would seem an allusion to the fragmentary nature of human self-knowledge without God, which is the substance of the passage in Corinthians, according to which, we can in this life only 'know in

part', until 'that which is perfect is come', when 'that which is in part shall be done away':

> For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

Graves's heroine, like Parrot, is seeking self-knowledge from her own reflection. She looks into the mirror in the hope of finding the answer to a riddle, an 'aenigmate':

> Ah, mirror, for Christ's love
> Give me one token that there still abides
> Remote, beyond this island mystery
> So be it only this side Hope, somewhere,
> In streams, on sun-warm mountain pasturage,
> True life, natural breath; not this phantasma.

However, there is no suggestion here, as there is in Skelton, that such hope of a 'total' self-knowledge lies in the knowledge of God. In a complex passage omitted in later versions, the murderer contemplates the prospect of divine judgement on her actions 'in life gone by', only to reject the notion of repentance:

> A rumour, scarcely yet to be reckoned sound,
> But a pulse quicker or slower, then I know
> My plea is granted; death prevails not yet.
> For bees have swarmed behind in a close place
> Pent up between this glass and the outer wall.
> The combs are founded, the queen rules her court,

Bee-serjeants posted at the entrance chink
Are sampling each returning honey-cargo
With scrutinizing mouth and commentary,
Slow approbation, quick dissatisfaction.
Disquieting rhythm, that leads me home at last
From labyrinthine wandering. This new mood
Of judgment orders me my present duty,
To face again a problem strongly solved
In life gone by, but now again proposed
Out of due time for fresh deliberation.
Did not my answer please the Master's ear?
Yet, I'll stay obstinate. How went the question,
A paltry question set on the elements
Of love and the wronged lover's obligation;
Kill or forgive? Still does the bed ooze blood?
Let it drip down till every floor-plank rot!
Yet shall I answer, challenging the judgment:-
"Kill, strike the blow again, spite what shall come."
"Kill, strike, again, again," the bees in chorus hum.

Sisson described these lines as 'among the most telling in Graves's *oeuvre*', but he offered no elaboration on the statement other than that this is 'poetry which cannot be made up by any skill or ingenuity... it is a reluctant deposit on the floor of the mind'[33]. These are certainly sinister lines, which inhabit the same no-man's land between fear and aggression, victim and persecutor, as 'Rocky Acres'. The lack of repentance for such violent aggression is based on the cyclical nature of a guilt shared between victim and aggressor. The dead lover is guilty of betrayal, and the victim of his betrayal becomes, in the act of revengeful murder, his persecutor. In her 'mood of judgment'

the murderer reconsiders her decision to kill her lover and reaffirms it, though the frenzy of the last lines exposes this as the imbalanced judgement of a disturbed mind, while the frenzied stabbing recalls the hand to hand fighting with fixed bayonets which was a characteristic horror of First World War battles. Graves was seeking to come to terms with his own guilt about the war by a justification of his actions and spreading the burden of guilt. That he failed to do so is evident in the exposure of the murderer's continued frenzy and in the fact that he omitted the whole of this passage in subsequent versions, reducing the poem to a less ambiguous statement of despair and hopeless longing for escape.

In 'The Pier-Glass' the heroine looked to the mirror for reassurance that there was a reality other than the nightmare 'phantasma' in which she was imprisoned, as she evoked a vision of sanity and normality which is dreamlike and unattainable. In 'Down', Graves uses imagery of sickness rather than madness - but essentially the same desire for escape is expressed through the sick man's dream in which he remembers an innocent and therefore disease-free childhood. Security and health in both poems are dependent on innocence. For the neurasthenic poet to restore his own sanity and health he needed above all to find a way of freeing his mind of its burden of guilt.

'Nebuchadnezzar's Fall' as a metaphor for poetry

Graves's reliance on dream imagery, metaphor and symbolism to describe the essentially ineffable nature of his emotional disturbance has led to some confusion about meaning, as we have seen. 'Nebuchadnezzar's Fall' is one such vivid dramatization whose underlying meaning has remained particularly obscure. Kirkham describes the poem as a 'recognizable allegory for the degrading experience of trench warfare'[34], but criticises the 'analogy' as 'relatively fanciful and not entirely clear... . The poet's moral attitude is uncertain, hovering between horror at the king's fate and the desire to see it as having a salutary effect'[35]. Carter admits to no such problem of meaning but asserts, somewhat unconvincingly, that it presents 'the larger signficance of the experience of war in terms of civilisation', and proceeds to attribute its absence of any 'promise of redemption' to its having been written 'in the shadow not only of the trenches... but also of the Treaty of Versailles'[36].

Carter compares the description of Nebuchadnezzar humiliated and crawling through the mud to descriptions of conditions in the trenches, and it seems to me that both he and Kirkham have been led by this imagery of mud and brutishness to misinterpret the meaning of the poem, which has only a tenuous link with Graves's war experience through this borrowing of its imagery.

In the story of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation, taken from Daniel 4, 1-37, Nebuchadnezzar is punished for the pride he takes in what he has managed to create on earth, the 'golden image' and the famous hanging gardens of Babylon. Graves's poem thus opens with Nebuchadnezzar walking through the gardens and admiring his own achievement:

> Frowning over the riddle that Daniel told,
> Down through the mist hung garden, below a feeble sun,
> The King of Persia walked: oh, the chilling cold!
> His mind was webbed with a grey shroud vapour-spun,
>
> Here for the pride of his soaring eagle heart,
> Here for his great hand searching the skies for food,
> Here for his courtship of Heaven's high stars he shall smart,
> Nebuchadnezzar shall fall, crawl, be subdued.

These lines should make it clear that Graves is writing about Nebuchadnezzar the artist and creator, not the tyrant or warrior, which he might have emphasised were this indeed a serious poem about war and 'civilisation'. It is precisely because he is a creator, a master artist who lacks the necessary humility before God, which causes his punishment, as symbolically he is struck down at the moment of greatest pride in his work:

> 29 At the end of twelve months he walked in the palace of the kingdom of Babylon.

> 30 The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?

'While the word was in the king's mouth', he is struck down by God as a lesson to remind him of the greater might of 'the most High'. Rather than a 'recognizable allegory' of war, or a vague comment on civilisation, the poem is a light-hearted dramatization of the artistic process which Graves described in *On English Poetry* when he spoke of the 'necessary arrogance' of poets, who have 'most arrogance before writing their poem of the moment, most humility when they know that they have once more failed'[37]. In 'Nebuchadnezzar's Fall' Graves enacts the poet's transition from arrogance to humility with vivid and graphic imagery, the sharpness of which makes it one of the most successful of the early poems. It is a mildly humorous description of an artist who has got what he deserves, the inevitable humiliation of all who dare 'courtship of Heaven's high stars'. That it draws on the 'brutish' imagery of trenches is not in itself proof that it is about war:

> He crawls, he grunts, he is beast-like, frogs and snails
> His diet, and grass, and water with hand for cup.
> He herds with brutes that have hooves and horns and tails,
> He roars in his anger, he scratches, he looks not up.

Rebellion against social conditioning and interest in socialism

If Graves's initial decision to fight in the war was, as I have earlier suggested, in part a reflex response resulting from his social conditioning, as well as due to a perceived need to prove his personal worth according to the value system instilled in him by his education both at home and at school, then one of the most profound and lasting consequences of his actually having fought in the war was paradoxically a rebellion against this social conditioning and a rejection of this value system and its behavioural expectations. After the war he resented the personal toll this conditioning had had on him, commenting that he had 'paid... heavily for the fourteen years of [his] gentleman's education'[38]. He then became the *enfant terrible* of a distinguished and traditional family, a role he grew into and relished. *Goodbye To All That*, when it is not concerned with his military experience, is a gleeful, triumphant defiance of the Graves family values. This defiance was present, of course, in the schoolboy who admired Samuel Butler, but after the war he felt more fully liberated from upper middle class morality. Sisson considered the book as more concerned with 'shocking the Wimbledon milieu', and 'rubbing them up the wrong way', than with 'the elucidation of truth'[39].

The initial manifestation of Graves's rebellion in practical terms was a decision not to pursue any profession, despite his family trying to steer him towards a career in the diplomatic service or as a schoolmaster[40]. In the absence of any private source of income, apart from a small army disability pension, this decision meant accepting a very modest standard of living compared to the middle class expectations of his family and peers, while he tried to eke out a precarious income from his writing.

In political terms, Graves, along with Sassoon and many other literary young men, expressed his rebellion in the most extreme form imaginable for a 'gentleman' in 1918, he became a socialist[41]. Nancy shared his 'revolutionary idealism' and his 'support for the Bolsheviks', but his family was outraged[42]. By 1921 he was still a socialist but, despite joining a local branch of the Parliamentary Labour Party and standing successfully as a Labour candidate in the Islip Parish Council election, he was 'dissatisfied with Parliamentary socialism' and expressed 'greater sympathy' with communism, though he never actually joined the Communist Party[43].

Life with little money was difficult for Graves and Nancy, partly because neither of them had any practical preparation which would have equipped them for survival on a modest income. Despite his own struggles, Graves's political conscience made him acutely aware that he was still comparatively well off

compared to the real poverty of the working class families he came into contact with after they moved to Islip in June 1921. Rural Oxfordshire was in the grip of a deep recession in which many suffered genuine deprivation, and *Goodbye To All That* contains a modest account of how Graves actively helped a number of desperate cases. He took further political steps to encourage self-help by distributing information on birth control to the village women, to the consternation of many. His writing, however, reflects none of these political concerns nor any of this obvious awareness of the reality of life around him. Instead, the description of life in the English countryside is a wholly idealised one, giving no hint of his first-hand knowledge that it meant hardship and suffering.

Despite being politically active for the first and last time in his life, Graves's view of poetry meant that his political and poetic concerns were kept separate. His poetry had turned inward during the later stages of the war and an egocentricity emerged which was to establish itself as one of the overriding characteristics of his mature verse, the subject of which is almost invariably 'I' or 'we'.

Neurasthenia and the idealisation of love

Just as Graves's descriptions of country life are isolated from disturbing reality, his account of his relationship with Nancy was, at least at first, similarly sentimentalized and sanitized. Graves's neurasthenia, Nancy's uncompromising feminism and short temper, an awkward physical relationship and an often desperate shortage of money - as well as four children arriving in quick succession - could not have made the marriage an easy one. Any problems are ignored, however, in the cosmetic sentimentalizing of love, until a chink of reality breaks through in 'One Hard Look':

> One smile relieves
> A heart that grieves,
> Though deadly sad it be,
> And one hard look
> Can close the book
> That lovers love to see.

Graves's achievement as a love poet is not as a celebrant of a sentimental or wistful ideal, despite returning to this in an outburst of saccharined verse towards the end of his life, in poems such as 'The Green-Sailed Vessel', 'Crucibles of Love' and 'Three Words Only', which are themselves attractive because of a highly polished wit and lyricism, but as with the less

accomplished Georgian lyrics, they possess a purely cosmetic attractiveness. The excitement of much of Graves's love poetry lies instead in its expression of romantic disillusion, and its exploration of the pain and suffering of the disappointed or betrayed lover - an exploration which was ultimately to lead to his 'discovery' of what he called the 'single theme' of the White Goddess poems.

This single theme of love, betrayal and destruction at the hands of the beloved, has its earliest origins in a sequence of poems charting the gradual disintegration of his first marriage. This marriage was based on an idealised vision of romance but it was also inextricably linked with Graves's neurasthenic condition. 'The Finding of Love' tells how the poet, 'Bound in a nightmare mood of dense murk', had longed for 'an end to grief, / For joy in steadfastness':

> Then through his distress
> And clouded vision came
> An unknown gradual flame...

The emphasis placed on 'steadfastness' in this poem identifies the love it celebrates as essentially marital in character. The experience of war had emphasised the transitoriness of life; as an antidote to this in peacetime the poet seeks stability, a permanent relationship in which:

> ...fixed and sure
> He shall endure
> Holding peace secure.

The finding of such a love is hailed not simply as symbolising the opposite of war, but as the cure for the mental sickness engendered by war. It serves to exorcise the poet's haunted state and dispel his nightmare mood:

> No more, no more,
> Forget what went before!
> Not a wrack remains
> Of all his former pains.

This optimism was short-lived, and the euphoria at the finding of love rapidly gave way to confusion and bewilderment at its complexity and elusiveness. 'Song of Contrariety' is another poem to relate the finding of love to the poet's neurasthenia. It retells the history of that love and identifies its source as the poet's disturbed state of mind and his need for love as an emotional curative:

> At summons of your dream-despair
> She could not disobey...

By now the poet knows, however, that the 'joy in steadfastness' offered by the finding of love is based on an innocent and naive assumption that once love is found it can be held on to:

> Love might come at your command
> Yet will not stay.

The language of this poem is drawn from concepts of authority, service and duty. This recalls the marriage service which had so 'horrified' Nancy that she had only agreed to proceed with the ceremony on condition that its authoritarian tone was 'modified' and the service 'reduced to the shortest possible form'[44]. Graves's ready agreement to these changes and his sympathy for his wife's feminism - not to mention his later concept of womanhood in the White Goddess period - should serve to warn against a purely feminist interpretation of this poem as the expression of a male frustration at the inability to dominate a female partner. There is instead a more subtle subtext which shows that this is a poem as much about Graves's neurasthenia as it is about his love, for the language of the poem recalls not only the marriage service but also Graves's recent military life which had conditioned his thinking so strongly he found it hard to shake off army habits and soldierly ways of thinking, which continued to dictate his modes of behaviour in numerous situations long afterwards[45]. In 'The Song of Contrariety' this is shown by the conscious inability of the poet to explain his love in this language of authority. Being in love has made the world so complex that he is no longer even sure what is real or not. The world as he

has known it until now - the world where 'commands' are 'obeyed' - has literally been turned upside down:

> Far away is close at hand,
> Close joined is far away.

Not only is the subordinate lover free in this world to choose whether to obey or not, the poet is uncertain whether or not the whole affair has been a fantasy, another of the waking dreams or 'hauntings' with which he was burdened:

> Is the presence empty air,
> Is the spectre clay...?

Such uncertainty about reality leads the neurasthenic to suspect that his illness has been the source of the relationship more completely than he had hitherto realised in 'The Finding of Love'. He now fears that this love, like the ghosts which haunt him, has only been 'lent substance by despair'.

'Sullen Moods' expresses a strong sense of guilt at his own responsibility for the collapse of the romantic dream he had tried to act out in marriage. He was well aware that his neurasthenia made him difficult to live with, but there is also here a veiled accusation that Nancy has been less than understanding in her response to his mental illness by reacting to his depressions harshly rather than sympathetically:

> Do not repay me my own coin,
> The sharp rebuke, the frown, the groan;
> Remind me, rather, to disjoin
> Your emanation from my own.

'Sullen Moods' is one of several appeals to his wife to join him in rescuing the dream they had previously shared, but it is also the clearest expression of the undoubted connection between Graves's neurasthenia and his vision of love, as he repeats his gratitude for having been rescued by the beloved from insanity and near death:

> Help me to see you as before
> When overwhelmed and dead, almost,
> I stumbled on that secret door
> Which saves the live man from the ghost.
>
> Be once again the distant light,
> Promise of glory, not yet known
> In full perfection - wasted quite
> When on my imperfection thrown.

In 'Sullen Moods' Graves identifies his desire as something which is mysterious, intangible and difficult, perhaps even impossible, to attain ('secret door', 'distant light', 'promise of glory'). Earlier in the poem he had described the companionship of love and the consolation it affords, but acknowledged too that this was not the platonic companionship he had enjoyed with close friends

at school and in the regiment. In trying to describe how this love is different he uses an overtly religious frame of reference:

> You, now that you have come to be
> My one beginning, prime and end,
> I count at last as wholly me,
> Lover no longer nor yet friend.

A similar asexual innocence characterises the imagery of 'The Hills of May':

> Walking with a virgin heart
> The green hills of May,
> Me, the wind, she took as lover
> By her side to play.
>
> Let me toss her untied hair,
> Let me shake her gown,
> Careless though the daisies redden,
> Though the sun frown.
>
> Scorning in her gay courage
> Lesser love than this,
> My cool spiritual embracing,
> My gentle kiss.

There is not only a great deal of sublimation in these descriptions of love, but an ambiguous attitude to sex. Although the poem describes a physical embrace, it is 'cool' and 'spiritual', the delicate touch of a gentle wind. By identifying himself with the

wind, the poet absents himself physically from the embrace, so although he can enjoy the spiritual pleasure of the encounter, he has no physical needs to satisfy or be satisfied. Reality, of course, was different: in 'Sullen Moods', his lover was to be found behind a 'secret door', an image which suggests she possessed a profound sexual fascination for him.

Both Graves and his wife, who were virgins when they married, found the sexual aspect of their relationship embarrassing and awkward[46]. Graves had developed a priggish attitude to sex at school and his army service in France had done nothing to alleviate this. On the contrary, he found the sexual habits of his fellow soldiers to be extremely distasteful and his widespread unpopularity in the regiment can be attributed in large part to his voicing of these opinions and his tendency to lecture his fellow officers on the subject of fornication[47]. In *Goodbye To All That* he remarks that his public school education had made him a 'pseudo homosexual'[48] and until his marriage all of his 'amorous' relationships had been both homosexual as well as 'chaste and sentimental'[49]. The sexual attitudes prevalent at Charterhouse clearly made a deep and lasting impression on Graves. The following account describes a dichotomy between love and lust which was part of his schoolboy conditioning and which determined his future attitudes so powerfully that it is worth quoting in full:

> There was a true distinction between 'amorousness', by which the headmaster meant a sentimental falling in love with younger boys, and eroticism, which was adolescent lust. The intimacy, as the newspapers call it, that frequently took place was practically never between an elder boy and the object of his affection, for that would have spoilt the romantic illusion, which was heterosexually cast. It was between boys of the same age who were not in love, but used each other coldly as convenient sex-instruments. So the atmosphere was always heavy with romance of a very conventional early-Victorian type, yet complicated by cynicism and foulness.[50]

A 'romantic illusion' complicated by 'foulness' well describes the picture of love which emerges in Graves's poetic account of his first marriage. In later years Graves wrote wittily about the absurdities of lust, in memorable poems such as 'The Thieves' and 'Down, Wanton, Down'. 'The Kiss' lacks the urbanity of this later attitude, being a more emotional and personal denunciation of sex:

> Is that Love? no, but Death,
> A passion, a shout,
> The deep in-breath,
> The breath roaring out,
> And once that is flown,
> You must lie alone,
> Without hope, without life,
> Poor flesh, sad bone.

In these early love poems sexual desire is never part of the celebrations of romance. Even as procreation in the context of marriage it is loveless and sordid, an action guiltily confined to the cover of darkness:

> We spurred our parents to the kiss,
> Though doubtfully they shrank from this -
> Day had no courage to review
> What lusty dark alone might do -
> Then were we joined from their caress
> In heat of midnight, one from two.

The failure to integrate sexual desire into the romantic illusion has two major consequences. First of all it gives an air of unreality to the celebrations of a love which expresses itself with 'cool spiritual embracing', or rather unconvincingly defines its 'last refinement' as an ability to 'lie apart, yet sleep and dream together'. Secondly, it creates a vision of desire as emotional disturbance, and any expression of this desire as a reprehensible loss of balance or control. In 'The Incubus' and its later companion piece, 'The Succubus', sex is the spoiler of dreams. The first of these poems takes the viewpoint of a mysteriously disembodied force which satisfies its gross desires on a sleeping victim. This victim, a man, shudders with fear but is helpless to resist an invasion of his body and mind which, as in 'The Kiss', results in an orgasm which is explicitly symbolic of death. This symbolism makes the gratification of desire a form of moral

suicide. Lust not only destroys love, it destroys oneself, while the personification of lust as an incubus is an attempt by the poet to abdicate responsibility for his own base desires:

> Bound in Body, foot and hand,
> Bound to lie at my command,
> Horror bolted to lie still
> While I sap what sense I will.
>
> Through the darkness here come I,
> Softly fold about the prey;
> Body moaning must obey,
> Must not question who or why,
> Must accept me, come what may,
> Dumbly must obey.

Lust is part of the poet's subconscious existence, a force beyond the control of his rational self which 'smiles for freedom' as he awakes. The erotic dream is the forced submission to these ungovernable forces and is intriguingly couched in the language of authority and command which, as in 'The Song of Contrariety', recalls both military discipline and the wedding ceremony. The poet is helpless and therefore blameless because he 'must obey' without question the commands of his subconscious. This rather desperate assertion suggests a parallel with the traditional defence of the soldier who avoids personal blame for having taken life because he was only following orders, a defence Graves himself was to reject[51].

In 'The Succubus' the blame for lust is accepted squarely. This is part of a greater truthfulness characteristic of the thirties poems in general, but the self-criticism is unduly severe, suggesting that despite maturity Graves had still not reconciled 'the thing's necessity' with a lingering romantic idealism. He himself admitted in *Goodbye To All That* that he found it 'very difficult' to free himself from a strong 'sexual embarrassment' which he believed to have been instilled in him by his early religious training[52], which perhaps accounts for the zealous puritanism with which he attacks his sexual instinct. In this account of another painful erotic dream, the poet's 'prayer' is 'longed-for beauty, / Slender and cool'. However, the erotic dream becomes a nightmare as his prayer is 'answered' by coupling brutally with a 'devil woman', bringing him 'despair in ecstasy'.

> With paunched and uddered carcase,
> Sudden and greedily does she embrace,
> Gulping away your soul, she lies so close,
> Fathering you with brats of your own race...

The poet is once again the helpless victim who suffers a sense of spiritual loss, and although the sexual act engenders new life, it is only at the expense of his own death. The poem ends bitterly with the ironic observation that the nightmare is a fitting punishment of the crime, as it asks, 'is the fancy grosser than your lusts were gross?' The vision of the succubus is thus a

mirror held up to reflect the true nature of the poet's sexual desire, her ugliness an image of his fantasy's own 'foulness'.

NOTES

1. Both *Over the Brazier* and *Fairies and Fusiliers* were noticed by a number of reviewers, perhaps due to the efforts of Graves's father on their behalf (see RPG-1, p. 148). In a letter to Sassoon on 23 June 1916 (O'PREY-1, pp. 51-54) Graves mentions that the reviews of *Over the Brazier* are 'very affable, mostly'. He quotes the *Times Literary Supplement*'s very favourable review, already cited, and notes that John St Loe Strachey wrote in the *Spectator* that 'Mr Graves's verses have a quality which renders them memorable', while the reviewer in the *Nation* predicted that 'If he will develop a broader and deeper temper and perceive that flexibility is a means not an end, he should do excellent work'. *Fairies and Fusiliers* was 'as favourably reviewed as I [Graves] had hoped ' [letter to Marsh, 29 December 1917, in O'PREY-1, p. 90]. Conrad Aiken in *Dial* 65 (19 September 1918, pp. 214-215) was 'delighted' by Graves's fusion of diction and thought and his lack of affectation, and commended the honesty and vividness of his verse which avoided being 'ostentatiously serious'. The reviewer in *New Republic* 17 (18 January 1919, p. 348) admired the contrast of the brutality of the war poems with the 'childish songs' of beauty, love and 'laughter'. *Fairies and Fusiliers* 'had gone into two editions because it was published in the war-years when people were reading poetry as they had not done for many years' (GTAT29, p. 394). Building on the success of these first two volumes, Graves's publisher (Secker) issued 1,000 copies of *Country Sentiment* but it is an indication of this volume's relative lack of success that the same publisher issued only 500 copies of *The Pier-Glass* in the following year, and Graves described the sales of these as 'virtually non-existent' [letter to Marsh, June 1922, in O'PREY-1, p. 137]. *The Feather Bed*, which followed in 1923, was limited to an edition of only 254. Heinemann published 1,000 copies of *Whipperginny* later that year, and the number of copies issued of *Mock Beggar Hall* (1924) is unknown, but only 525 copies of *Welchman's Hose* were published in 1925. (Source: F. Higginson's *A Bibliography of the Work of Robert Graves* (Vane, 1966).)

2. For Graves's opinion on the decline of the anthologies see his letters to Marsh in O'PREY-1, pp. 116-117, and 135-138.

3. GTAT29, p. 394.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. W. R. Benet, in the *Literary Review* (22 September 1923), p. 61.

8. J. M. Murry, in *The Athenæum* (9 April 1920), pp. 472-73.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Collected Poems 1938*, p xv.

12. Foreword to *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xiv.

13. *Ibid.*

14. See in particular, letter to Sassoon 9 July 1918 about his new happiness, and the 'waking terror of poison gas, which is my most awful nightmare whenever I feel ill and think about the line' (O'PREY-1, p. 95).

15. GTAT29, p. 353.

16. MS-S, p. 567.

17. GTAT29, p. 381.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. GTAT29, p. 374-375. Graves records a conversation with Hardy in 1920: 'He said that he had been able to sit down and write novels by time-table, but that poetry was always accidental, and perhaps it was for that reason that he prized it more highly'.

21. C. H. Sisson, *English Poetry 1900-1950* (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), p. 189.

22. GTAT29, p. 381.

23. O'PREY-1, letter to Blunden 12 July 1919, p. 113.

24. Letter to T. S. Eliot, No Date [September? 1927] in O'PREY-1, p. 178.

25. *The Crowning Privilege*, p. 136.

26. GTAT29, pp. 57-58.

27. M. Kirkham, *The Poetry of Robert Graves* (The Athlone Press, 1969), p. 45.

28. Kirkham, p. 43.

29. Carter, pp. 120-21.

30. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 109.

31. *On English Poetry*, p. 132.

32. *The White Goddess*, p. 433.

33. C. H. Sisson, *English Poetry 1900-1950* (Rupert Hart-Davis, 1971), p. 191.

34. Kirkham, p. 32.

35. *Ibid*, p. 47.

36. Carter, p. 140.

37. *On English Poetry*, p. 137.

38. GTAT29, p. 26.

39. Sisson, p. 188.

40. GTAT29, p. 353 and RPG-1, p. 219.

41. GTAT29, pp. 354-355 and RPG-1, p. 209 and pp. 215-216.

42. GTAT29, pp. 354-355.

43. *Ibid*, p. 396.

44. *Ibid*, p. 335.

45. *Ibid*, p. 352.

46. *Ibid*, p. 336 and MS-S, pp. 74-75.

47. MS-S, p. 75.

48. GTAT29, p. 41.

49. *Ibid*.

50. *Ibid*, p. 66.

51. MS-S, p. 567.

52. GTAT29, pp. 32-33.

CHAPTER FOUR

POETIC UNREASON:

EARLY THEORIES OF POETRY, PERSONAL RECONSTRUCTION AND THE ADVENT OF LAURA RIDING

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CHAPTER FOUR

POETIC UNREASON:

EARLY THEORIES OF POETRY, PERSONAL RECONSTRUCTION AND THE ADVENT OF LAURA RIDING

Graves's early theories of poetry and its 'purpose'

In 1922 Graves published the first of his investigations into the origins of poetic inspiration. *On English Poetry* is 'an irregular approach to the psychology of this art, from evidence mainly subjective'[1] and, significantly, is dedicated jointly to the two major influences on Graves's thought at the time, T. E. Lawrence 'of Arabia and All Souls' College, Oxford', and W. H. R. Rivers, the distinguished and progressive psychologist who had treated Sassoon and Owen for 'shell-shock' at Craiglockhart Hospital. Both men were 'responsible' for it being written the way it was[2], but it was Rivers's interest in the connection between poetic inspiration and the subconscious which encouraged Graves to construct an elaborate theory of poetry as therapeutic activity. As such it benefited not only the 'mentally disturbed' poet, but

also the reader 'similarly troubled', who is 'homeopathically healed' under the pseudo-hypnosis of poetic 'musicality' by the presentation of 'an allegorical solution' to his 'trouble'.[3] *On English Poetry* is written in a humorous, self-mocking tone as if embarrassed by its own outrageous propositions. However, this belies its underlying seriousness for Graves, who thought it an 'important book'[4] at the time, though he later disowned its central theory, which he recounted rather more succinctly in 1949:

> As a neurasthenic, I was interested in the newly-founded Freudian theory: when presented with English reserve and commonsense by W. H. R. Rivers, who did not regard sex as the sole impulse in dream-making or assume that dream symbols are constant, it appealed to me as reasonable. I applied his case history method of accounting for emotional dreams to the understanding of romantic poems, and found it apt enough; though poems were obviously complicated, I wrote, by the 'secondary elaboration' that the poet gives them when no longer in a self-hypnotized condition.[5]

Graves intended the book to be a personal 'manifesto'[6] but it never achieves this, being instead a retrospective justification of personal practice. It is, however, remarkable as an early attempt to construct a coherent theory of poetry in the light of modern scientific thought - particularly Freudian thought - and achieves a number of insights into the relation between text and reader as well as into the psychoanalytic interpretation of poetry, which anticipate the developments of later, more sophisticated theories.

The very notion of theory was itself radical enough within the Georgian *milieu.* Graves complained in a letter to Edward Marsh about the 'hostile attitude' of his fellow Georgians to his 'analytic method'[7], defended himself in another letter to Sassoon[8], and still felt it necessary three years later in his second book of criticism, *Poetic Unreason*, to justify his practice:

> There has been a considerable opposition to these analyses of poetry from some of my friends who are poets by profession...
>
> I am told that my interest in analysis is purely individual and untypical, that I have no right to say that a modern poet ought to be an analyst if he wishes his work to last beyond his own generation, when in most of my well-known contemporaries there is a genuine aversion from analysis in any form.[9]

While he admits that his own interest in analysis derived partly from an attempt 'to find relief from a war neurosis', he defends a theoretical approach to poetry on the grounds that the old 'emotional approach theory' is no longer satisfactory and that in practical terms 'analytic thought is the best possible preventative against writing by formula'[10]. More than anything, however, his analysis in *Poetic Unreason* constitutes a call for a poetry which provides an adequate response to the challenges of modern society. To do this it must come to terms with the changes in society and reconcile 'scientific and philosophic theory on the one

hand and the old pulse of love and fear on the other'[11]. He also defined what it should mean to be a poet 'in the fullest sense of the word':

> The poet...must stand in the middle of the larger society to which he belongs and reconcile in his poetry the conflicting views of every group, trade, class and interest in that society'.[12]

This is a poetry which is 'involved' rather than 'engaged', a term that implies the poet's participation in conflict, which Graves here explicitly seeks to avoid. His vision is of a non-dialectic involvement which consolidates, reconciles and thereby 'heals' the conflicts in society. That this is essentially a nostalgic concept is acknowledged in the acceptance that only Chaucer, Skelton and Shakespeare have 'succeeded memorably' in 'representative spokesmanship' (though Skelton's was surely a curious and limited success) and in the conclusion that such a poetry is not realisable in the present context. 'Poets, readers, and critics' of the time were 'all equally lost, and few with even the courage of scepticism'[13]. 'Modern society is in such confusion', and in this context, he concludes, 'the greatest service a poet can do is to provide a temporary escape to the Lubberland of fantasy'[14].

The reference here is to Walter de la Mare's poetry, which Graves had long admired and which is the most significant model

for his own escapist verse. However, in noting the irony and paradox inherent in the fact that escape was the 'greatest service' contemporary poetry could offer a troubled world, there is an implied awareness that escapism is an inadequate strategy for dealing with his own sense of confusion. Escapism is seen to offer only a temporary, illusory release from the current social and moral turmoil, and Graves's observation that 'the walls of Mr de la Mare's magic garden are beginning to crumble'[15], effectively marks his decision to renounce Georgian fantasy.

In the first half of the decade Graves wrote four works of criticism which concentrated, for the main part, on the origins of poetic inspiration and the 'sensuous aspects' of poetic 'craft': *On English Poetry*, *Poetic Unreason*, *Another Future of Poetry* and *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*. He later renounced this theoretical approach, commenting wryly that 'anything worth preserving' from his poetry between 1922 and 1926 'was written in spite of, rather than by the help of, my new theories'[16]. This was an unjustly harsh renunciation, for despite the shortcomings of the theories *per se*, the process of analysis proved extremely fruitful in terms of his artistic development. His tendency to use his own work as the 'case history' for much of his analysis meant that his work was subjected to a rigorous and prolonged self-scrutiny. Alone among the Georgians at this time, his poetry challenges itself and asks itself difficult questions, and from 1925 onwards a new tone is evident as the poetry acquires a searching

edge and abandons to a great extent its previous tendency to whimsy and escapism.

Controlled emotion and philosophic enquiry were to become permanent characteristics of his mature work, and it is unlikely they would have been achieved without the preceding process of analysis. That this was an extension of his psychoanalysis perhaps explains the personal nature of much of his theory, particularly the development of an atavistic view of poetry as the natural expression of a troubled psyche, with its formalistic structures deriving from rituals of 'primitive magic'. Graves's blend of psychology and anthropology in *On English Poetry* was based more on a mythological concept of primitive society than on scientific observation, but its effect on his attitude to poetic inspiration was established during this period of recovery firmly enough for one to see the first shoots of the later White Goddess theory emerging:

> Primitive man was much troubled by the phenomenon of dreams, and early discovered what scientists are only just beginning to acknowledge, that the recollection of dreams is of great use in solving problems of uncertainty; there is always a secondary meaning behind our most fantastic nightmares. Members of a primitive society would solemnly recount their dreams to the wise ones of the clan and ask them to draw an inference. Soon it happened that, in cases of doubt, where the dream was forgotten and could not be recalled, or where it was felt that a dream was needed to

> confirm or reverse a decision, the peculiarly gifted witch doctor or priestess would induce a sort of self-hypnotism, and in the light of the dream so dreamed, utter an oracle which contained an answer to the problem proposed. The compelling use of rhythm to hold people's attention and to make them beat their feet in time, was known, and the witch doctor seems to have combined the rhythmic beat of a drum or gong with the recital of his dream. In these rhythmic dream utterances, intoxicating a primitive community to sympathetic emotional action for a particular purpose of which I will treat later, Poetry, in my opinion, originated.[17]

In *A Sinking Island*, Hugh Kenner invokes Stanley Fish's 'powerful metaphor of "interpretive communities"' to suggest that 'critical activity began to seem so urgent in England around 1930 because *social* fragmentation was being perceived'[18]. Graves's critical writings of the early twenties were part of a similarly rearguard action against personal fragmentation, and part of his search for stability and cohesion. Thus although his selective adaptation of modern scientific method to literary analysis suggested exciting new possibilities, essentially he was pursuing a conservative agenda in which traditional forms of poetry were to be adapted to the demands of a changed society.

Desire for 'continuity'

In an attempt to restore his artistic equilibrium after the violent social and cultural disruption of the war, he perhaps naturally looked to pre-war literature for his models, and in particular to Hardy. Graves went to see Hardy at his home in Dorchester in August 1920, when he had already started to compile the material for *On English Poetry*, and the encounter was important for Graves, whom Sassoon described as Hardy's 'poetical grandson'[19]. During their conversation on modern poetry, Hardy had told Graves that, in his opinion, '*vers libre* could come to nothing in England':

> 'All we can do is write on the old themes in the old styles, but try to do a little better than those who went before us'.[20]

On English Poetry contains a chapter on the 'limitations' of *vers libre* which essentially is a restatement of Hardy's views. Graves recounts approvingly the criticism of Swinburne made 'by an elder poet, who asks to remain anonymous'[21], who must surely be Hardy, as is the 'friend' who 'denied that there was such a thing [as *vers libre*] possible, arguing beyond refutation that if it was *vers* it couldn't be truly *libre* and if it was truly *libre* it couldn't possibly come under the category of *vers*'[22].

To a poet still traumatised by the prolonged experience of mental and physical horrors which his poetry had on the whole proved unequal to, a great poet's advice 'to write on the old themes in the old styles', and the consoling suggestion that this was all he could be expected to do, offered Graves a reassuring agenda for restoring lost stability. Graves was trying hard to forget the war and identify new themes for his poetry, and the influence of Hardy at such a critical juncture confirmed the innately conservative tendency of his verse and encouraged a nostalgic desire for continuity.

At no point in his analyses of poetic form did Graves question whether or not such expectations of continuity were realistic, given the cultural and social fragmentation evident by the early part of the decade. Despite his poetry having been an active element in the process of change which produced this fragmentation, *On English Poetry* describes a cloistered art in which form and language are valued most for their ability to operate in the private recess of a resolutely personal world, the individual subconscious. 'Art is not moral'[23], he declares, rebuffing Sir Philip Sidney's 'defence' as irrelevant 'in these days', yet in one of many internal contradictions he proceeds to warn against an art which is 'definitely anti-moral'. Such art is bound to be marginalised through its antagonism of the public and will, he claims, tend to have 'more dexterity than robustness'[24].

In similarly cryptic mode he states his own 'personal feeling' on the 'moral question':

> ...poets who modify the general ethical principles first taught them at home and at school, can only afford to purchase the right to do so at a great price of mental suffering and difficult thinking.[25]

At first this passage seems at odds with the image of the rebellious *enfant terrible* who had shocked Wimbledon and sympathised with communists and feminists, but the clear implication is that he himself *has* suffered sufficiently to claim the right to 'modify' the 'general ethical principles', unlike the civilian poets such as Eliot who were 'gently neutral' and who have not paid the required price[26]. 'Modify' is a carefully chosen word in this context, denoting an entirely reasonable and proper evolution of standards, rather than any more alarming notion of sudden reform or rebellion. It suggests the process of an establishment reforming itself from within, a notion compatible with Graves's presentation of himself in the book as a traditionalist, even at times adopting the tone of the perennial retired army officer:

> Wanton, lighthearted apostasies from tradition are always either a sign or a prophecy of ineffectual creative work.[27]

In the following chapter, he appears to change tack as he notes (without a shred of evidence) that:

> all or nearly all the great English poets have been men either of ungenteel birth or of good family which has been scandalized by their subsequent adoption of unusual social habits during the best years of their writing.[28]

To 'the polite society of their day' all, or 'nearly all', these poets were 'outsiders to a man'. This is the first instance of what was to become a common rhetorical device in Graves's essays and lectures on poetry - the invocation of a vague historical precedent to justify his own practice. Clearly, the man of good family who has scandalized his relatives with his 'unusual social habits' is none other than Graves himself, but the significant point of the passage is that Graves is beginning to see his own location on the fringes of society as a legitimate place for a poet. He may be an 'outsider' in the eyes of his family and of the general 'crowd', but as an outsider-poet he is in a central tradition, a true insider in the company of the truly great. It was a paradox which gave a reassuring meaning and moral purpose to his alienation, and fed the arrogance of his later pride in the title of poet.[29]

This passage is also the first instance of a resolutely contextual tendency in Graves's criticism. In *Poetic Unreason*, he wrote that poetry needed to be considered in relation to 'the social, religious and scholastic conditions' of the day[30], and he claimed that a reader faced insurmountable difficulties in appreciating poetry from a different context to his or her own:

> We cannot escape from our context to form a common life with people or poems beyond the limits of this context.[31]

A perfect reader would have 'perfect adaptability to any context', and as this is clearly impossible it is also, as a consequence, impossible 'to lay down absolute canons of criticism that favour one poet and damn the next'[32]. In coming to this conclusion he denounces academic English, its pretensions to objectivity and its endorsement of 'absolutist textbooks' of 'scholarly criticism' which fail to realise that social and cultural contexts change, and with them so called objective evaluations of past literature[33].

Attitude to contemporary poets

In similar vein, in the Clark lectures given at Cambridge in 1955, Graves recalled that for a young poet in the early nineteen-twenties there were no 'living idols'[34]. The ones who came closest to any such status were Hardy, Doughty, William Davies and A. E. Housman, and although Graves 'was still young' at the time, he 'could regard them as... friends and colleagues... simply because the current textbooks of English literature stopped at Tennyson and Swinburne - we were all equally post-Canonical'[35]. The formation of a modern canon with the rise of academic

English, in which 'even' he has a 'niche', produced, he claimed, an orthodoxy in which readers are exhorted to 'admire... recognised objects of official appreciation - namely idols'[36]. He dismissed the standard canonical account of post-war literature as the simplistic endorsement of changing 'periodic verse-fashions' - partly, one suspects, because it cast him not as an 'idol' but as a relative footnote:

> I am briefly mentioned with the Georgian War Poets of 1914-18 (*see* p. 11), successors to the Imagists (*see* p. 1) and themselves superseded (*see* p. 11) by the Modernist Movement of the twenties; which merged (*see* p. 111) into the Left-Wing Movement of the thirties; which was suffocated (*see* p. 141) by the 1939-45 War; which gave a pause for reflection, the new poets being few and inhibited. And for the setting up of five living idols - namely Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Auden and Dylan Thomas (*see separate chapters devoted to each*).[37]

That Graves associated himself with traditional poetic forms in the early twenties rather than with modernism was not simply a question of differing attitudes to stylistic expression or 'verse-fashions', as he himself would have it. Samuel Hynes, in *A War Imagined*, observed 'a deeper difference' between the war poets and the figures of the new movement in the sense of separation inevitable between 'all old soldiers' and their 'civilian contemporaries':

> the feeling that *I* was there, and fought, while *you* stayed at home and profited.[38]

Such feelings were particularly strong in Graves, as we have seen, and go a long way towards explaining his hostile attitude to the modernists. His attack at Cambridge on the new 'idols', published as 'These Be Your Gods, O Israel!', revealed a personal animosity based largely, it seems, on the fact that all of them had escaped involvement in military conflict. Criticising Auden's 'Phi Beta Kappa poem' of 1946 ('Under Which Lyre: A Reactionary Tract for the Times') he comments:

> The cockney rhyme of *Slaughter* and *shorter* expresses his contempt of the young fools who allowed themselves to get caught in the war. There are, by the way, no fighting men among the idols - no successors to Ben Jonson who once 'killed his man in the sight of both armies'; which is paradoxical in an age that has sentenced every second man to ordeal by battle.[39]

Auden, he admits ironically, had gone to Spain at the outbreak of civil war 'in warlike ardour', but had seen no fighting and instead 'played plenty of ping-pong in a hotel at Sitges'. Of the five idols Graves expresses admiration only for Eliot - but he restricts his savagely double-edged praise to Eliot's early poetry:

> I wish he had stopped at 'The Hollow Men', his honest and (indeed) heart-breaking declaration of poetic bankruptcy, to

> the approved Receiver of poetic bankruptcy, the
> Hippopotamus Church.[40]

Graves was still at the time a personal friend of Eliot, and he had deeply appreciated Eliot's courage in publishing *The White Goddess*. But Graves's account of their friendship reveals an unbridgeable gap between them based on their widely different experiences during the war. They had first met in 1916, when Graves had been struck by Eliot's shyness and 'startling' good looks, and by his

> reluctance (which I found charming) to accept the most obvious phenomenon of the day - a world war now entering its bloodiest stage, and showing every sign of going on until it had killed off every man in London but the aged and neutrals. I was due to return to the Somme any day, and delighted to forget the war too in Eliot's gently neutral company.[41]

Friendship and conversation were one thing, however, but the self-pitying tone in some of Eliot's poetry aroused Graves's indignation:

> But why is he complaining? Who forced him, during the Battle of the Somme, to attend London tea-parties presided over by boring hostesses?[42]

The anger of this statement - forty years after the Somme - shows the depth of Graves's bitterness and resentment towards writers who led the emergent modernist movement having spent the war

establishing their careers and developing their art. Graves was of course not alone in these feelings. Most surviving war poets experienced a similar sense of dislocation and bitterness, as Hynes observes:

> A man like Graves, who was only nineteen when the war began, must have felt himself outrageously overtaken by time, deprived of his literary youth before he'd had it, and supplanted before he had begun to make a literary name - a poet who was too Georgian to make common cause with the home-front Modernists, and too experienced and war-weary to join the post-war young... . These men were the real Lost Generation, not the men who died; they had fallen out of the literary world of their own time, into the gap of the war. Or so, at least, it must have seemed to them.[43]

It is a curious fact, however, that in 1955 Graves should still have attacked Eliot's 'neutrality' compared to his own engagement in the war, when he himself had by then pursued a resolutely neutral role as a bystander of all further 'history' for nearly thirty years.

Social marginalisation

Graves had fought in the war to preserve that vague construction of social, moral and spiritual values signified by the notion of 'England', but by the end of the war it seemed to him that much of what he had thought worth preserving in the notion of

'England' had been destroyed by the English themselves, rather than by any foreign army - a view he shared with Owen who, in September 1918, attacked the *Daily Mail*'s vision of a victorious nation:

> 'Though all be worthy Victory which all bought,
> We rulers sitting in this ancient spot
> Would wrong our very selves if we forgot
> The greatest glory will be theirs who fought,
> Who kept this nation in integrity.'
> Nation? - The half-limbed readers did not chafe
> But smiled at one another curiously
> Like secret men who know their secret safe.
> (This is the thing they know and never speak,
> That England one by one had fled to France,
> Not many elsewhere now, save under France.)

The implication of Owen's 'Smile, Smile, Smile' is that in sacrificing the younger generation to defend the nation's 'integrity', the older generation had irrevocably betrayed the entire notion of 'England'. A similar bitterness against a society which had betrayed itself was the essential subtext of much of Graves's writing in the post-war period. Six weeks after writing this poem Owen had joined the 'undying dead', but Graves - in the iconography of Owen's poem still part of 'England' - had by then already returned from France to find that Owen's vision of the post-war was an accurate one and that the cultural landscape of 'England' had been as radically transformed by the war as the actual landscape of Flanders. His prolonged attempts to relocate

himself in this cultural landscape were never fully successful, for it seems Graves was not to feel comfortably at home in England again. The bucolic retreat to Oxfordshire, the dream of domesticity ('The men's first instinct will be making houses', the *Daily Mail* had predicted in Owen's parody) and the theoretical analysis of his art were all part of this attempt to adapt to abrupt cultural change. The failure of each of these strategies perhaps inevitably led to the final strategy of rejecting the new England and leaving its shores again, this time not with the intention of defending it against external aggression but of abandoning it to its own self-destructive devices; and this time with the intention of not coming back.

If on the one hand Graves was angry that the war had caused the destruction of much that was good in 'England', on the other the notion of writing 'on the old themes in the old styles' implied a contradictory willingness to believe that the world was essentially the same place as it had been in 1914, and could be written about in the same way. This willingness to believe in the continuity of the old order, despite a few 'modifications', was part of the quest for 'picking up the pieces' of his life after the disruption of war. All the survivors of the war were 'backward looking' in this sense, out of step with new developments. Graves, Sassoon and Blunden all wanted stability rather than a part in any ongoing revolution. Graves wrote well about the war throughout the early nineteen-twenties, but many of his poems on other subjects have a

curious unreality and sense of pastiche to them: traditional poems about traditional subjects, written in an untraditional world. In the crucible of trench warfare Graves and the other war poets had tested their poetry to new limits, but most who survived were reluctant to test any further, at least for the time being. In military terms, they had been the advance party which had fought valiantly and gained much ground. But they had also sustained heavy casualties and, wounded and exhausted, had dug themselves in, leaving the next push to the new recruits who followed behind.

As Hynes has shown, those who survived the war found themselves to be a marginalised group. Their roots were no longer in England but in a war already receding in the national consciousness, a war which may have ended in public, political terms but which continued to dominate their private existence. Their writing was therefore rooted in a world of memory and imagination rather than in the actual concerns of a new society. It is with this rootlessness in mind that Hynes identifies the 'other meaning of "lost generation"':

> Here *lost* means not *vanished* but *disorientated, wandering, directionless* - a recognition that there was a great confusion and aimlessness among the war's survivors in the early post-war years, much moving about, much changing of plans, many beginnings without endings, and comparatively little solid work done.[44]

In 'The General Elliott' Graves describes the fate of a war hero who is marginalised and diminished to the point of being nothing more than a face on the sign of a public house. A prose gloss of the poem in *On English Poetry* explains that Graves was drawn to the idea of the poem because of his fond memories of 'a real old-fashioned General beloved by his whole division, killed in France (1915)'[45]. He mused that the real inn on which the poem was based 'must have been founded by an old soldier who felt much as I did'[46] about having served under another such commanding officer. The point of the poem, however, is that nobody - not even the publican or locals who drink at the inn - now knows who the General was:

> The potman cannot well recall,
> The ostler never knew,
> Whether his day was Malplaquet,
> The Boyne, or Waterloo.
>
> ....
>
> And paint shall keep his buttons bright
> Though all the world's forgot
> Whether he died for England's pride
> By battle, or by pot.

This is, on the surface, one of Graves's high-Georgian vignettes about the quaintness of English country life, but the fact that Malplaquet and the Boyne are 'imperishable glories for the Royal

Welch Fusilier' and that the 'finest Colonel this regiment ever had... was killed at Waterloo'[47], should alert us to the personal nature of this poem. The historical General Elliott was the commander of Gibraltar from 1779 to 1783, and not a Royal Welch Fusilier at all, but not only does nobody know who he is any more, nobody except the poet, himself an old soldier, cares. It is an ironic comment on the neglect of national heroes when the public memory of the war they fought in recedes.

Graves's 'pseudo-death' and crisis of identity

In a more personal and melodramatic poem Graves confesses an urgent crisis of identity in himself. 'A Letter from Wales' is the last of the verse epistles to Sassoon, who is characterised in the poem as 'Captain Abel Wright', while Graves is 'Richard Rolls', a man perplexed by his inability to answer the question 'who am I?':

> This is a question of identity
> Which I can't answer. Abel, I'll presume
> On your good-nature, asking you to help me.
> I hope you will, since you too are involved
> As deeply in the problem as myself.
> *Who are we?* Take down your old diary, please,
> The one you kept in France, if you *are* you
> Who served in the Black Fusiliers with me.

> That is, again, of course, if I am I -
> This isn't Descartes's philosophic doubt,
> But, as I say, a question of identity,
> And practical enough. - Turn up the date,
> July the twenty-fourth, nineteen-sixteen,
> And read the entry there...

On this date, Richard Rolls had 'died, poor fellow, the day he came of age' - a reference to the report of Graves's death 'of wounds' at the Battle of the Somme. His injury had actually been sustained on July 20th 1916, when despite the fact that he was originally given up for dead and his parents notified of his death, he made, under the circumstances, a reasonably rapid recovery. None of this happened on the 'day he came of age', July 24th, but when the official casualty list was published this was given as the date of death and duly reported in *The Times*[48]. He wrote to Sassoon:

> By the way, I died on my 21st birthday. I can never grow up now.[49]

On August 6th he wrote 'Escape', which begins, 'But I *was* dead, an hour or more'. Despite the light-hearted tone of the poem, it records Graves's belief that 'as a matter of fact', he did die on his 'way down to the Field Ambulance'[50], an experience which was subsequently to hold profound significance for him. It also influenced his later work on 'reconstructing' the life of Christ, in *King Jesus* and *The Nazarene Gospel Restored*, for he believed

that the resurrection described a similar experience to his own, and that Jesus had not died on the Cross but had suffered a 'death-like coma'[51].

'A Letter from Wales' makes the claim that Sassoon had endured a similar pseudo-death and that ever since both their 'substitutes' had been 'pretending' to be their old selves. There are three drafts of the poem extant in manuscript[52], the first two of which do not fictionalise the account. The second draft asks plainly:

> For unless Robert Graves had really died
> ~~Suppose he had nt died~~ recovered from his wounds
> ~~How~~ could he so have ~~recovered soon enough~~ got better
> ~~As~~ to go out climbing less than two months later?

The only explanation for the poet is that 'a second Robert Graves appeared', which is 'the view that the facts force on me'. The second draft has a very different account of what Sassoon is purported by Graves to have 'recorded' in his 'diary' on hearing of Graves's death, including eight lines entirely omitted in publication. Again the draft states Graves by name, but adds an interesting epitaph on his own view of how posterity would rate his work, and has Sassoon write two melodramatic lines on the romantic hero's demise:

> "~~This evening~~ Today I met
> Meredith, ~~First~~ [? illeg.] ~~The~~ transport serjeant of the Second. ~~Batt~~
> He told me Robert Graves has died of wounds.

> I found ~~old~~ out Doctor Dunn and he confirmed it
> Dunn says he wasn't in much pain, he thinks",
> (Thank God!) A piece of 8 inch through the lungs
> ~~As they were going up to take~~
> ~~The day they took the near end of High Wood.~~
> ~~He died the very day he came of age.~~
> ~~He might have been a poet of importance~~
> ~~Certainly not a dull one; well, he's dead."~~
> Then the first draft of a verse epitaph
> Expanded later into a moving poem
> "When roaring gloom surged inward and you ~~died~~ cried
> Groping for friendly hands and clutched and died."

It seemed to Graves at this time that a fundamental personal reconstruction first required the acceptance of a collapse so severe it could only be rationalised as a form of death. It would be wrong to think that he was being merely fanciful in adopting this idea, just as it would be mistaken to suggest that he never really 'believed' in the existence of the White Goddess except as metaphor, for his imagination was generally enthusiastic in accommodating supernatural explanations of apparent mysteries and paradoxes. In a letter to Sassoon he explained further what he had meant about the appearance of a second personality:

> It boils down to this... You identify me in your mind with a certain Robert Graves now dead whose bones and detritus may be found in *Over the Brazier*, *Fairies and Fusiliers* and the land of memory. Don't. I am using his name, rank and initials and his old clothes but I am no more than his son and heir and so it is as an old friend of my father that I want to meet you; my father had a sort of hero-worship of you and I

> have heard him talk of you with great awe even. That's exactly how I feel at present...[53]

Graves's life was punctuated with a number of new starts and abrupt changes of direction, most notably in 1929 when he left England and in 1939 when he parted company with Laura Riding. However, at no other point did it seem so important to him to bury the past as it did in the early twenties, when he thought it necessary for his survival to reject the received identity which was essentially the product of external influences during education and the formative experience of the war, and become his own man, as it were selecting a new identity for himself which was somehow independent of and free from the influence of previous experience. The self-redefinition or 'self-fashioning' which was to become a feature of his writing in the second part of the decade first required a sense of liberation from the restrictions of the 'inherited' or conditioned self.

It is not hard to see in this notion the influence of T. E. Lawrence, whom Graves was in regular contact with at this time, in the months preceding Lawrence's desperate reinvention of himself as aircraftman Ross, his own attempt to free himself from the burden of the past. After Lawrence's identity was revealed and he was dismissed as an embarrassment to the Royal Air Force, he attempted to create another new life and new identity, this time as T. E. Shaw in the Tank Corps. Shortly

afterwards, Graves wrote a poem about Lawrence in which he gives him yet another assumed identity, that of Alexander the Great. 'The Clipped Stater' is one of Graves's historical reconstructions in which he manipulates the mythology of the past to make a personal statement about the present, ironically claiming to correct the official version of events and reveal an extraordinary truth. In this version, Alexander does not die but is deified, and at the point of becoming a god he asks himself, 'what now awaits the assurance of my hands?' Omnipotent and immortal he chooses the only challenge left, the renunciation of power for powerlessness. The tortuous account of Alexander's reasoning identifies Lawrence's rejection of his previous existence as a form of suicide:

> Then Finity is true Godhead's final test,
> Nor does it shear the grandeur from Free Being;
> 'I must fulfil my self by self-destruction.'
> The curious phrase renews his conquering zest.
>
> He assumes man's flesh...

The language of this passage clearly associates Lawrence not just with Alexander but with Christ[54], and like Christ the experience of existence he chooses is devoid of comfort, power or worldly glory, as he seeks freedom paradoxically through humility and acceptance:

> ...he glories in his limitations:

> At every turn his hands and feet are stayed.

'Alexander the Man' accepts his new fate as a frontier guard in a remote foreign land, serving with 'gaol-rogues and the press-gang's easy captures', but is confused when he receives for his pay a silver coin bearing his own image. The experience causes him to doubt not only the reality of the present but the true nature of his previous identity:

> And how does the stater, though defaced, owe service
> To a God that is as if he had never been?
>
> Is he still God? No, truly. Then all he knows
> Is, he must keep the course he has resolved on...

The end of the poem, with its image of the lonely frontier guard preserving his integrity as he endures a bare, harsh existence on the ramparts far from home, anticipates the later 'Cuirassiers of the Frontier'. But the key element of the poem is in the stress it places on holding to a resolved course, which links it to 'Outlaws' and 'The Legs' in its concern for self-watchfulness and keeping one's way. In those poems, however, keeping one's course was a strategy for self-preservation, whereas Alexander has no illusion about his 'course' being anything other than an inexorable process of self-destruction.

Graves dropped 'The Clipped Stater' from his *Collected Poems 1938*, presumably because by then he had seen through the

Lawrence legend, which the poem both feeds on and promotes, and had come to a greater awareness of Lawrence's psychological troubles which inevitably provoked a reassessment of his motives[55]. It was left out of all further collections until reinstated in the 1986 *Selected Poems*, partly owing to a persuasive defence of the poem by Jorge Luis Borges, who believed it to have a durability independent of its association with Lawrence[56]. In *Atlas*, Borges commented on the poem by characteristically concentrating on its invention of a new mythology, observing ironically that Graves's account of Alexander's survival is a 'fable' which 'deserves to be very ancient', being a more significant version of events than accepted historical 'fact'[57]. However, Borges here paraphrases it incorrectly, presumably because he is recalling the poem from memory, reporting that Alexander is exiled and reduced to poverty by misadventure and that his receipt of the stater allows him an opportunity to reflect on his former greatness. Borges's account of the 'fable' stands as a comment on the irony and mystery of fate, but it is not the same as the story Graves had invented. Instead it has been transformed quite unmistakably into one of Borges's own *ficciones*, itself an irony which, one assumes, would not have entirely displeased the creator of 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote'.

Images of metamorphosis and the ending of love

Both 'The General Elliott' and 'The Clipped Stater' chart the metamorphosis of a military hero into a static icon which both represents and questions the nature of the former hero's glory and his true identity. Their apparent survival of death by transformation into symbol is a grotesque illusion, however, for either as pub sign or coin their significance to a vulgar and inferior posterity is a wholly self-interested and utilitarian one which ignores and abuses the personal worth and nobility of the hero. This was a period of great confusion and upheaval in Graves's life, as his Oxford career became increasingly problematic, the shop he had opened with Nancy was forced into liquidation and their marriage began to collapse, and all the while he continued the struggle to cure himself of his persistent neurasthenia. In this period of change Graves resorted on several occasions to similar images of metamorphosis, particularly in the account of his failing marriage. In 'The Presence' it is the beloved rather than the poet who has undergone a transformation so fundamental it can only be described as a form of death, similar to the spiritual death of 'Richard Rolls':

> Why say Death? for Death's neither harsh nor kind:
> Other pleasures or pains could hold the mind
> If she were dead: for dead is gone indeed,
> Lost beyond recovery and need,
> Discarded, ended, rotted underground:

> Of whom no personal feature could be found
> To stand out from the soft blur evenly spread
> On memory; if she were truly dead.
>
> But living still, barred from accustomed use
> Of body and dress and motion, in abuse
> Of loving-kindness (for our anguish too
> Denies we love her as we swear we do),
> She fills the house and garden terribly
> With her bewilderment, accusingly
> Enforcing her too sharp identity...

The 'pangs' that have 'changed her substance, but have brought no death', are the pangs of lost love - a loss here seen as more terrible even than death. Just as Graves was conscious of his own change of personality in 'A Letter from Wales', he here sees his wife as having undergone a similar transformation so that they confront each other as strangers. Although Graves's early celebration of his love for Nancy had veered towards triteness and sentimentality, his account of its end is charged with an emotional intensity which produces some of his best poetry to date - most notably in 'Pure Death'[58]. This poem opens with the frank admission of the poet's extreme fear of death, which he knows in its true aspect, having seen it stripped of the comforting delusions of philosophy and religion by which we traditionally attempt to avoid it:

> This I admit, Death is terrible to me,
> To no man more so, naturally,

> And I have disenthralled my natural terror
> Of every comfortable philosopher
> Or tall dark doctor of divinity:
> Death stands again in his true rank and order.

Having established his intimacy with the 'true' nature of death and acknowledged his terror, the poet proceeds to find a similar terror present in their love for each other:

> Therefore it was, when between you and me
> Giving presents became a malady,
> The exchange increasing surplus on each side
> Till there was nothing but ungivable pride
> That was not over-given, and this degree
> Called a conclusion not to be denied,
>
> That we at last bethought ourselves, made shift
> And simultaneously this final gift
> Gave. Each with shaking hands unlocks
> The sinister, long, brass-bound coffin-box,
> Unwraps pure Death, with such bewilderment
> As greeted our love's first accomplishment.

The meaning of these lines is not immediately apparent, but most critics seem to accept Douglas Day's exegesis of the poem in *Swifter than Reason*. Day states that the poet is describing the annihilation of the self in pure love, or what Day calls 'the mutual surrender' of the lovers' 'innermost selves', which is, he admits, a 'perhaps rather conventional point for a love poet to make'[59]. Such a reading, however, denies the evidence of the text in which

the keyword is 'malady' - the word used to describe the present state of their love and which is hardly compatible with the hazy idealism envisaged in Day's notion of the 'ultimate gift' between lovers. Similarly, the counterpointing of this 'death' in the penultimate line against the beginnings of love suggests its definition as the end of love. Day's reading of the poem also fails to take account of the biographical and canonical contexts of the poem, marking as it does the end of Graves's marriage and immediately following the poems which claim that both the poet and his lover have undergone character changes or pseudo 'deaths' which have made them strangers to each other.

The problem of interpreting 'Pure Death' is compounded by Graves's subsequent and radical rewriting of the poem for republication in 1938, in a way which fundamentally alters possible readings to suit his later sympathies. Carter rather misleadingly quotes only the revised version, without qualification, and describes it confidently as a poem 'to Laura Riding'[60]. In its revised form this is undoubtedly so, but the change of dedication is achieved only by a revision which transforms the meaning:

> We looked, we loved, and therewith instantly
> Death became terrible to you and me.
> By love we disenthralled our natural terror
> Of every comfortable philosopher
> Or tall, grey doctor of divinity:

> Death stood at last in his true rank and order.
>
> It happened soon, so wild of heart were we,
> Exchange of gifts grew to a malady...

This clearly is not the same poem as the 1926 original, which hinged on a direct comparison between death and the present 'malady' ('Therefore it was...') that is now avoided. And while in the original the 'malady' had no provenance, it is now presented as excess of love, the result of unrestrained wildness of heart. The changes to 'Pure Death' make it the 'rather conventional' poem it certainly was not in its original form, and although Graves's clinically detached dissection of extreme passion remains compelling, it has become over-controlled, the emotion described is no longer the threat it once was.

'Pygmalion to Galatea', a love poem written in 1926 which heralds an end to the pessimism and doubt of the post-war work and instead offers a vision of harmonious and equal love, includes another image of metamorphosis as a marble statue symbolic of female beauty comes to life at the request of the poet. The idealism and purity of 'Pygmalion to Galatea' is the antithesis of those other poems - 'The Incubus' and 'Succubus' - in which lovers are brought to life by the power of a lustful imagination, only to cause the poet's death. Pygmalion seeks in Galatea the physical charms of traditional feminine beauty. These she promises to provide, but she also warns, in her first words, that

she offers not the satisfaction of physical desire but release from its tyranny:

> "Pygmalion, as you woke me from the stone,
> So shall I you from bonds of sullen flesh.
> Lovely I am, merciful I shall prove:
> Woman I am, constant as various,
> Not marble-hearted but your own true love.
> Give me an equal kiss, as I kiss you".

This is, we understand, a form of love new to the poet's experience. Galatea is at first uncertain about the 'new qualities' of physical life in herself - 'blood, bones and breath' - but she acknowledges 'the thing's necessity', accommodating the needs of the flesh while promising to transcend its desires. The idealism and optimism of 'Pygmalion to Galatea', which are in such stark contrast to the other love poems of the time, mark it out distinctively as one of the first love poems addressed to Laura Riding, whom he met for the first time on January 2nd, 1926, having by then already corresponded with her for some time. Graves was still married to Nancy Nicholson, and Riding had come from America to visit them at their joint invitation, but this poem written around the time of their first meeting reveals the hopes that Graves saw in this new relationship. It is the account of a poet successfully using his poetry as a means of seduction. Having woken from the stone, Galatea remains on her pedestal 'in doubt' until she has 'heard out' Pygmalion's 'melody' or poem (in

the first draft in manuscript, 'tune'[61]). This poem is an appeal for her to join in an equal partnership of love, but it also contains an element of emotional ultimatum: 'Love if you will: or stay stone-frozen'. Galatea too has something to lose by not becoming Pygmalion's lover. In the published version Galatea is 'alive and burning' ('flushing' is crossed out in the second draft, perhaps because although this suggests a rush of emotion, as well as a sense of vigour, 'burning' implies that she herself possesses a strong sexual desire) but without accepting and returning the human love offered to her she will lack true life. The first draft contained the suggestion of her heart being frozen, though this was rejected, presumably because it negated the sense of wonder of her 'blood' in line 3, and contradicted the image of her 'flushing':

> Love if you will: or ~~be~~ stay ~~love~~ - ~~heart frozen~~ stone-frozen.

Riding, like Galatea, was literally the work of art which had come to life: Graves had discovered and admired her poetry and was driven by this admiration to want to know her personally[62]. Like Pygmalion he 'woke her' from the page and invited her into his life. His ambition in this new relationship was for the companionship of an equal, who would provide him with the warmth of female love as well as intellectual partnership:

> 'As you are various, so be woman:

> Graceful in going as well as armed in doing.
> Be witty, kind, enduring, unsubjected:
> Without you I keep a heavy house.'

That Galatea should immediately threaten to liberate and transform Pygmalion was not only an uncanny presage of things to come, but suggests that Graves as Pygmalion was a willing candidate for such reform.

Reliance on mentor figures and Riding's 'authority'

Graves's first acquaintance with Riding came at a crucial time when, as we have seen, he was involved in a process of radical self-redefinition. He was seeking to liberate himself from the constraining influence of his education, the war and a failed marriage, and Riding undoubtedly encouraged his rebellion which culminated in the 'final' rebelliousness of *Goodbye to All That*, written at the height of her influence. Liberation from one set of constraints did not mean he was free, however, for he now voluntarily accepted Riding as a dominant authority to whom he deferred on all matters, whether literary or not.

Riding was the last in a succession of mentor figures chosen by Graves, as well as the most influential. At Charterhouse he had

attached himself first to George Mallory and then to Edward Marsh, while after the war Rivers had been the dominant influence, followed by T. E. Lawrence. However, Rivers had died in 1922 and Lawrence, by then too self-absorbed and unwell to provide much support, had all but disappeared into the anonymity of first the Air Force and then the Tank Corps. At more or less the same time Graves met Basanta Mallik, an Indian philosopher undertaking research at Oxford. Under Mallik's influence Graves became interested in metaphysics to the extent that it replaced his interest in psychology and even threatened to displace poetry as his prime pursuit[63]. Mallik was an independent thinker who drew on both Hindu and Christian tradition to construct a theory of ethics which appealed to Graves and influenced a number of poems at the time, notably those collected together in the *Mock Beggar Hall* volume[64]. The rather strained versification of *ad hoc* philosophical observations which were neither entirely original nor entirely coherent made the volume Graves's worst failure, but the poems also marked a significant shift in Graves's poetic stance, taking further a process which had begun in *Whipperginny*, published a year earlier in 1923. This shift was away from personal emotional intensity towards a conscious detachment, in which non-personal religious, psychological and philosophical issues were considered with a cultivated distance and composure. These poems marked the end of Graves's prolonged and painful period of self-sacrifice in

which it had seemed to him more important to write well than to be well:

> To those who demand unceasing emotional stress in poetry at whatever cost to the poet - I was one of these myself until recently - I have no apology to offer; but only this proverb from the Chinese, that *the petulant protests of all the lords and ladies of the Imperial Court will weigh little with the whale when, recovering from his painful excretory condition, he need no longer supply the Guild of Honourable Perfumers with their accustomed weight of ambergris.*[65]

This emotional distancing or detachment became one of the major characteristics of Graves's work from this point onwards, and as such was the most significant result of his friendship with Mallik, rather than any specific philosophical stance.

Mallik's philosophy took the form of empirical enquiry and he distrusted the notion of 'any unifying religion or ideology'[66]. He advocated instead 'strict self-discipline' and 'constant self-watchfulness', which had also become a preoccupation of Graves's[67]. When Mallik left England in 1923 he invited Graves to join him in Nepal. Graves refused but expressed his continued admiration and affection for him in 'To M. in India', a poem which more than any other of the time suggests Graves was finally coming to terms with the effects of the war. It describes a more settled state of mind and a philosophical acceptance of his marginality:

In India you
Exiled at your own home as I at mine,
Aghast at the long cruelty of tradition,
At so much pain yet to be harvested
With the old instruments. In England I
Bruised, battered, crushed often in mind and spirit
But soon revived again like the torn grass
When, after battle, broken guns and caissons
Are hauled off and the black swoln corpses burnt.

Despite his influence on Graves Mallik made no attempt to become a guru, though it would seem he was aware of Graves's tendency to rely on a mentor figure for he warned him to be 'constantly' watchful against 'either dominating or being dominated by any other individual'[68], advice which he chose to ignore in his enthusiastic acceptance of Riding's domination.

Riding was different from any of Graves's other mentor figures for she fascinated him sexually as well as intellectually. In 'Pygmalion to Galatea', Galatea combines the roles of teacher and guide with lover and soulmate, and in another poem of the time Graves describes this sense of physical fascination with a lingering sensuousness and sexual ease startlingly different from any of his previous love poems, in which sex, if present at all, was something awkward and anxious:

To speak of the hollow nape where the close chaplet
Of thought is bound, the loose-ends lying neat

> In two strands downward, where the shoulders open
> Casual and strong below, waiting their burden,
> And the long spine begins its downward journey:
> The hair curtains this postern silkily,
> This secret stairway by which thought will come
> More personally, with a closer welcome,
> Than through the latticed eyes or portalled ears;
> Where kisses and all unconsidered whispers
> Go smoother in than the very lip,
> And more endeared because the head's asleep
> Or grieving, the face covered with the hands.

'The Nape of the Neck' describes the wariness of a lover who, having suffered disappointment and betrayal in love once, is reluctant to risk further pain through a new relationship. It ends, however, with a willingness to suffer at the hands of the beloved if need be, for the poet is vulnerable but trusting:

> And once more without shuddering or hardness
> [To] loll down the head to any chosen kiss.

This sense of trust in a lover who offers not simply sexual gratification but enlightenment is taken further in 'The Taint', the only other early love poem to Riding to be published in *Poems 1914-1926*. Graves considered his poems to be a record of his 'spiritual autobiography'[69], and 'The Taint' is undoubtedly one of the most significant episodes, even though he was later to omit it from his *Collected Poems* along with most of the other love

poems to Riding. 'The Taint' is a response to the question asked in Riding's poem 'The Mask':

> Is there no pure then?
> The eternal taint wears beauty like a mask.

Graves takes up the challenge set by this poem, admitting he is one of the 'corrupt', the 'insufficiently beloved', but rather than covering the corruption with a new mask, he wishes to eradicate the 'eternal taint' in himself. He begins by describing the difficulty of breaking free from the inherited or conditioned self which is now seen as dishonest and 'rotten'. For the poet to reform, however, he first needs to 'unwind / The early swaddlings of his mind', now blamed bluntly and directly on his parents' 'dishonesty', hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness:

> Being born of a dishonest mother
> Who knew one thing and thought the other,
> A father too whose golden touch
> Was 'think small, please all, compass much'...

The second stanza is addressed to Riding. It confesses the poet's 'rottenness' which in the past he has tried to 'cloak, dismiss or justify', but the encounter with her has made him more fully aware of the 'inward taint' which blights his character:

> of which I knew
> Not much until I came to you

And saw it then, furred on the bone,
With as much horror as your own.

She, on the other hand, has no such taint, having been 'born clean'. The language suggests that Riding was uniquely free from original sin, the 'taint' which marks all mankind at birth. Graves had of course abandoned his Christianity and it is unlikely that he maintained any lingering belief in the idea of original sin, but a religious overtone was to become a feature of future references in the poems to Riding, who was soon 'revealing' to Graves and others of their group that she was 'more than human', a goddess whom Graves himself was to talk of as 'holy'[70]. To such a 'pure' person he humbly submits himself for spiritual guidance, and for her sake pledges to try to reform:

and for the sake
Of your strict eyes I undertake
(If such disunion be allowed
To speak a sentence, to go proud
Among the miseries of to-day)
No more to let mere doing weigh
As counterbalance in my mind
To being rotten-boned and blind,
Nor leave the honesty and love
Of both only for you to prove.

The importance of distinguishing between the notions of 'doing' and 'being' was to emerge from this point on as one of central lessons Graves was supposed to learn under Riding's 'strict'

tutelage. 'Man Does, Woman Is', the title of one of Graves's poems written in the 1960s, sums up Riding's belief that men should learn from women not to distract themselves with the false business of achieving and 'doing' but simply learn better how to 'be'[71]. Graves's fault to date - admitted more in the startling humility and submission of the parenthesis than in the actual confession - is that his actions have allowed him to ignore the fact of his 'being rotten-boned and blind'. By the end of the decade he was claiming success in the struggle against this obsession with 'doing', declaring that his 'active life' was effectively at an end, having finally renounced his habit of 'enduring blindly in time'[72]. It was to be a painful process involving the public rejection of much of his life and work to date and the total submission of his art to the 'holy' authority of Riding, who increasingly began to appear even more unbalanced mentally than the neurasthenic Graves[73].

NOTES

1. *On English Poetry*, subtitle.
2. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 8 December 1921, p. 130.
3. *On English Poetry*, p. 85.
4. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh, 8 December 1921, p. 130.
5. *The Common Asphodel*, p. vii.
6. O'PREY-1, letter to Sassoon, 29 May 1921, p. 126.
7. *Ibid*, letter to Marsh, No Date [Early July 1922], p. 142.
8. Letter to Sassoon, 31 May 1922: 'As for your sneers at my analysmus - who was it said I must go and see Rivers about my book on poetry, eh?' (O'PREY-1, p. 135).
9. RG, *Poetic Unreason and Other Studies*, pp. 78 and 82.
10. *Ibid*, p. 79.
11. *Ibid*, p. 83.
12. *Ibid*, p. 82.
13. *Ibid*, p. 85.
14. *Ibid*.
15. *Ibid*.
16. *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xxi.
17. *On English Poetry*, pp. 19-20.
18. Hugh Kenner, *A Sinking Island, The Modern English Writers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), p. 208.
19. O'PREY-1, p. 153.
20. GTAT29, p. 377.

21. *On English Poetry*, p. 47.
22. *Ibid*, p. 48.
23. *Ibid*, p. 95.
24. *Ibid*.
25. *Ibid*.
26. See note 41 below.
27. *On English Poetry*, p. 95.
28. *Ibid*, pp. 96-97.
29. See, in particular, his view of the poet as expressed in *The White Goddess*, p. 17.
30. *Poetic Unreason*, p. 18.
31. *Ibid*, p. 43.
32. *Ibid*, p. 48.
33. *Ibid*.
34. RG, *The Crowning Privilege: Collected Essays on Poetry*, p. 134.
35. *Ibid*.
36. *Ibid*, p. 135.
37. *Ibid*.
38. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (The Bodley Head, 1990), p. 339.
39. *The Crowning Privilege*, p. 153.
40. *Ibid*, p. 153.
41. *Ibid*, pp. 146-47.
42. *Ibid*, p. 150.
43. Hynes, *A War Imagined*, p. 339.
44. *Ibid*, p. 396.
45. *On English Poetry*, p. 59.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid*, p. 60.

48. GTAT29, p. 277.

49. O'PREY-1, p. 57.

50. *Ibid*, p. 59.

51. 'Summary of Critical Principles' from *The Nazarene Gospel Restored*, reprinted in O'PREY-2, p. 294.

52. In the Special Collection at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

53. O'PREY-1, letter to Sassoon 31 May 1922, p. 134.

54. Graves makes this direct comparison in a letter to Liddell Hart, 18 June 1935: 'Let us be Plutarchean for once and make a comparison between T. E. [Lawrence] and Jesus Christ. "There is something singular in this parallel and what has not occurred to us in any other of the lives we have written, that T. E. should exemplify the maxims of J. C., and that J. C. should proclaim beforehand the happiness of T. E." (Publicola and Solon). No room for the whole thing here, but anyhow the Devil was (you agree) constantly leading T. E. up to an exceeding high place and showing him all the kingdoms of the earth, etc...'. (O'PREY-1, p. 254.)

55. This emerges in his correspondence with Liddell Hart, published in O'PREY-2, pp. 132-137.

56. In discussion with the author, July 11th 1982 at Deià.

57. J. L. Borges, *Atlas* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, S.A., 1984), pp. 52-53.

58. According to Graves, this poem is the exception to his practice of preserving the drafts of a poem, because it was written 'on one of those clever things you buy in railway bookstalls for taking notes on and erasing them' [letter to James Reeves, 3 June 1954, in O'PREY-2, p. 136.

59. Douglas Day, *Swifter Than Reason: The Poetry and Criticism of Robert Graves* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), p. 97.

60. Carter, p. 62.

61. There are three holograph worksheet drafts of the poem at the University of Buffalo. 'Tune' is changed to 'melody' in the second draft.

62. In the 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding' in GTAT29, Graves comments elliptically that he 'happened' 'by seeming accident upon your teasing *Quids*, [and was] drawn to write to you, who were in America, asking you to come to us' (p. 444). By comparison, Riding knew Graves 'at a disadvantage, by my poems of the war'.

63. GTAT29, p. 403.

64. Mallik's parents had been converted to Christianity and subsequently his education had been founded on both Christian and Hindu principles. Graves comments that 'Basanta's philosophy was a development of formal metaphysics, but with characteristically Indian insistence on ethics' (GTAT29, p. 403).

65. *Whipperginny*, pp. v-vi.

66. GTAT29, p. 403.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. 'Foreword' to *Poems and Satires 1951*, p. viii.

70. RPG-2, p. 93. See also p. 110 and p. 78: 'Laura had become more than a little unbalanced, and now revealed... that she was more than human. They could think of her, if they liked, as a goddess...'.

71. See also *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, p. 111: 'Man's biological function is to do; woman's is to be. The difference is not a contrast of mere activity with mere passivity.'

72. GTAT29, p. 443.

73. A state which was to lead her to attempt suicide in 1929. See RPG-2, pp. 86, 107-108; see also note 70 above.

CHAPTER FIVE

'THE SOURCE OF TRUTH':

THE INFLUENCE OF LAURA RIDING

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CHAPTER FIVE

'THE SOURCE OF TRUTH':

THE INFLUENCE OF LAURA RIDING

Changes in 'attitude to poetry'

In the introduction to *Collected Poems 1938* Graves wrote:

> 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.[1]

Thirty-one years later he repeated this, stating that what he had learned from Riding was 'a general attitude to things, rather than verse-craft', though he then also denied ever having consciously imitated her style[2]. There is no doubt that the influence of Riding's thought and her poetry is responsible for a marked change in the poems of *Poems 1929,* the first volume to be published after their first 'acquaintance', as well as in *To Whom Else?,* published in 1931, and in *Poems 1930-1933*. The most notable change in the poems in these three collections is a new

boldness and sense of liberation, both in subject matter and in style. The frank, almost brutal treatment of sex, for example, in 'Sandhills', 'The Tow-Path', 'The Succubus' and 'Down, Wanton, Down!' is very different from the earlier evasiveness of 'The Hills of May'. 'Sandhills' is an ironic account of how the 'beast with two backs' is 'a single beast', but paradoxically made of 'two' which becomes 'three' in the act of procreation. The playful but precise unravelling of the paradox, the boldness of the repetition ('By two and two and two and two again') and above all the dehumanisation of experience into abstractions and cyphers, are all characteristics of Riding's early work. In Riding's 'To a Loveless Lover', sex is the machine within the human, and a threat to the moral or spiritual 'substance' of the individual if not an expression of love:

> How we happened to be both human,
> Of the material to the machine...
>
> The one original substance is one.
> Two is two's destruction.
> But love is the single word wherein
> The double murder of the machine
> Is denied
> In one suicide...

'Sandhills' is a much less ambitious poem than this, restricting itself to the 'machine' rather than its transcendence, but there is

an undoubted similarity of approach, most obviously in the reduction of the lovers into anonymous numbers:

> Of here and there, of one and everyone,
> Of windy sand-hills by an unkempt sea,
> Came two with two in search of symmetry.

As in 'To a Loveless Lover', there is no love in 'Sandhills' except 'love of singleness', in other words lust, for it is the false 'singleness' created by 'two' in making the 'one' 'beast'. There is also, of course, the implication in this that lust is inherently selfish, an expression of 'love of self'. Behind both 'To a Loveless Lover' and 'Sandhills' is the same concern that sex threatens the integrity of the self. Sex, when 'loveless', is for Riding 'two's destruction', just as, when it is done in 'love of singleness' alone, it results for Graves in a fragmentation of individual identity in the 'two-four-eight-sixteenish single same / Re-registration of the duple name'. Like 'Towpath', with its 'anagrammagic' play on 'mansturbantiation', 'Sandhills' comes close to a vulgarity whose principal intention is, in 1929, presumably to shock its readers. The early drafts of the poem[3] are entitled 'Two O'clock in the Sandhills' and the poem in draft form is less evasive than the published version about the fact that it is describing two couples enjoying casual sex side by side in the open air, and relishes the moment by a precise attention to anatomical detail:

In left, foot, ~~and~~ right foot, left hand and right hand,
~~Having two hands, having two feet,~~
Desired three
~~Two eyes, two nipples and all complete~~.

Two beasts of two backs
Either side of a hill lie
Hand to hand, ~~foot to foot~~, mouth to mouth
~~Nipple to nipple~~, Breast to breast, eye to eye

The immorality of this situation is increased when, at the end, the couples are

Ready to play again
At the beast with two backs,
~~At the~~ In the sandhills with the two of the other two.

These twelve lines were all omitted in the final draft, presumably because (even if for no other reason) their 'coarseness' would be unacceptable for publication, three years before *Lady Chatterley's Lover* could be published even in an expurgated version in London[4].

The subject of 'Down, Wanton, Down!' is if anything even more shocking, being an address to the poet's erect penis. The title derives from the Fool's speech in *King Lear* (II, iv, 119) and the poem presumably found publication in 1933 thanks to its abstruse wit and obscure Shakespearian quibbling:

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

The reader needs to know that a 'bombard' is the 'earliest kind of cannon... throwing a stone ball or a very large shot' (*OED*) to appreciate that it is an ironic symbol of the phallus. Graves relied heavily on the *Oxford English Dictionary* when writing a poem, stating in 1962:

> A historical dictionary should always be within a poet's reach: preferably the big *Oxford English Dictionary* - the two-volume edition is insufficient... . I still consult the O.E.D. at least four or five times a day: never letting a doubtful word go by - I need to know its derivation, its first occurrence, its change of meaning down the centuries, and the sort of people who used it in different contexts.[5]

One assumes, therefore, that Graves knew that for Shakespeare a 'Bombard' was a container for 'sack', and by extension a 'toper', which enforces the suggestion that the 'wanton' has no control of his senses. There are similar quibbles on 'breach' and 'die'. 'Breach' continues the military metaphor in which the aggressive male member lays siege to the passive female, but the exact military definition of 'breach' is a 'gap or fissure' in a fortification, which has sexual overtones, as does the equivalent sounding 'breech', which is not only 'the garment covering loins and thighs' (*OED*), but in the plural is also 'the buttocks', while

for the Elizabethans it was 'part of a cannon', which neatly refers back to 'bombard'. 'Die' similarly concludes the image of a military attack but the paradox - given the usual Shakespearian quibble on 'die' - is that the metaphorical soldier's apparent defeat is the phallus's victory.

This new boldness in Graves's treatment of his subject matter was matched by an unaccustomed experimentation with language and verse structure, in 'Guessing Black or White', 'Railway Carriage', 'The Tow-Path', 'Landscape', and 'To Be Less Philosophical', while he also experimented with the 'prose poem' form in the three 'As It Were' poems published in *To Whom Else?*. Graves did (despite his later denial) learn or borrow specific 'new' techniques from Riding in these poems, but more importantly he gained from her a new 'attitude' to taking risks with both form and sense. Riding frequently unsettles her reader by inverting conventional sentence structure, as in 'Many Gentlemen': 'Many gentlemen there are born not babes'. Occasionally this is taken further, with words being repeated or positioned without regard to syntax, creating a deliberate confusion of form and sense. In her 'Elegy in a Spider's Web', 'meaning' depends on individual words and their relationship to each other, rather than on a conventional prose-like exposition of thought:

What to say when the

Who cannot
When the spider what
Does what does dies
Death spider death
Who cannot
Death cease death

Each individual word has connotations from earlier contexts within the poem, and by reintroducing and managing them in an apparently random and jumbled fashion, ideas already established are reconsidered or challenged, and new possibilities suggested.

In 'Echoes 26' there is a similar dislocation of syntax and again a deliberate attempt to baffle the reader:

What a tattle-tattle we.
What a rattle-tattle me.
What a rattle-tattle-tattle-rattle we-me.
What a rattle-tattle.
What a tattle-rattle.
What a we.
What a me.
What a what a
What a
What

In these lines the opening, self-confident definition of self, which is made pedantic and exact - despite its meaninglessness - by the arrangement of possible permutations in the first three lines, is undermined by the gradual reduction of the assertion, and the

parallel destruction of the sentence, into a final one word line, 'What'. That this is left as it were suspended by the lack of any closing punctuation allows it several possible readings: as the discredited residue of the opening assertion; as an exclamation which dismisses the absurdity of the assertion's complacency; and as a question, 'What a what?', or simply, 'What?'. That the poem is playful, baffling, and apparently nonsensical, is part of its exposure of the absurdity of a certain complacent frame of mind, and of its movement away from such complacency to an acceptance of confusion and an awareness of the need for a more genuine search for self-knowledge.

There is a similar arrangement of variations on dubious assertions, with a corresponding permutation of possible, non-specific pronouns, in Graves's 'To Be Less Philosophical':

> Our God is infinite,
> Your God is infinite
> Their God is infinite,
> Of infinite variety.
>
> God, he is also finite,
> God, she is also definite,
> He, she; we, they; you, each and it -

The validity of these assertions, which are contradictory and mutually exclusive, is undermined by a gradual movement towards nonsense - the same strategy as in 'Echoes 26'. The

'nonsense' of the final stanza is achieved by the seemingly random juxtaposition of isolated images taken from earlier verses, in which they had meaning as elements of other assertions. This cumulative scrambling of images, and the apparently purposeless repetition of words[6], are the same techniques as Riding used in 'Elegy in a Spider's Web', though here Graves maintains a conventional syntax, which again has the effect of exposing the absurdity of a complacent and assertive claim to knowledge:

> Each is a very smart Paris hat
> And may be divorced quite freely,
> Freely, freely in the Royal Artillery,
> To be each less philosophical.

Graves adopts a slightly less bizarre but still playful technique, designed to puzzle and challenge the reader, in 'It Was All Very Tidy' and 'Landscape'. The latter, published in 1929, draws on Riding's concern for the exact definition of experience through language which characterises her poems in *Love as Love, Death as Death*, published a year earlier. In the title poem, 'Death as Death', the poet strives 'To conceive death as death', frustrated by attempts to compare it to other experiences of life. The idea of death has become 'A blankness fallen among / Images of understanding', until through the contemplation of 'suicide' the 'body' realises it is something without comparison in life and therefore cannot be described in language which defines by comparison:

'Like this, like this, like nothing else.'
Like nothing - a similarity
Without resemblance.

In Graves's 'Landscape', the poet attempts to describe 'nature' by anthropomorphic comparison. However, just as it is impossible to describe death through images taken from life, the romantic attribution of human characteristics to an inert landscape leads to a nonsensical and arbitrary series of adjectival comparisons, culminating in the ultimate meaninglessness of comparing something with itself:

Whose [nature's] griefs are melancholy,
Whose flowers are oafish,
Whose waters, silly,
Whose birds, raffish,
Whose fish, fish.

This frustration with comparing nature with anything other than itself recalls Riding's 'The Wind Suffers':

As stone suffers of stoniness,
As light of its shiningness...

Conflict between 'creed' and 'craft'

Perhaps the most important aspect of Riding's influence was that her concern for meaning and definition, for identifying and describing the essence or reality of her own experience and of the world around her, led Graves to reconsider the purpose of verse technique and to distrust his own facility for creating 'harmonious variation'[7] at the expense of truthfulness. In the Introduction to *Collected Poems 1938* he announced that until he met Riding he had been overly 'preoccupied' with 'the physical side of poetry'[8] and insufficiently concerned with poetry as a means of discovering and expressing truth:

> I tended to make the test of a poem's worth not its internal coherence and truthfulness but its power to charm a large audience.[9]

For Riding, on the other hand, technique had always been peripheral to the 'uncovering' of 'truth', which for her defined the 'purpose' of poetry:

> A poem is an uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth.[10]

She was uncompromising in her assertion of this, rejecting any notion of subjective truth, or 'a kind of truth', for 'in truth there are no kinds':

> Truth is the result when reality as a whole is uncovered by those faculties which apprehend in terms of entirety, rather than in terms of merely parts.[11]

This resolute pursuit of truth led her to distrust the craftsmanship which had 'preoccupied' Graves, and to perceive an 'incompatibility' between what she termed the 'creed' and the 'craft' of poetry. The creed offered hope 'of speaking beyond the ordinary, touching perfection, a complex perfection associable with nothing less complex than truth', while the craft tied this hope to 'verbal rituals which court sensuosity as if it were the judge of truth'[12]. Graves's admission that he had been overly preoccupied with technique and the 'physical' or 'sensuous aspects of poetry'[13] thus suggests he accepted Riding's view of such conflict, and like her he now made 'truthfulness' the prime measurement of a poem's success. The struggle to express the truth was a difficult one, as he confessed at the end of *Goodbye To All That*, when he claimed the partial success of having 'learned to tell the truth - nearly'[14]. Poets who, on the other hand, did not at least make this effort, fatally compromised their poetic integrity in Graves's opinion, and none more so than W. B. Yeats, after he rejected poems by James Reeves recommended by Graves and Riding for inclusion in his edition of

the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Yeats's 'devilish comment'[15] on Reeves's poems genuinely scandalised Graves, who saw it as an admission of Yeats's 'cynicism':

> Too reasonable, too truthful. We poets should be good liars, remembering always that the Muses are women and prefer the embrace of gay, warty lads.[16]

By contrast, the most truthful - and therefore the best - of all contemporary poets was of course Riding herself. Michael Roberts, despite initial misgivings about including Riding in *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, gave generous space to her work and observed in his Introduction that she represented a view of poetry as 'the final residue of significance in language, freed from extrinsic decoration, superficial contemporaneity, and didactic bias'[17]. Riding's work consciously eschewed gratuitous 'sensuosity'[18], and made no concession to a 'plain reader's'[19] expectations of 'beauties'[20] in any purely cosmetic sense. Nor did she make concessions to clarity of meaning. She strove to express her thoughts 'exactly' and it was the reader's task to attend to the 'literal'[21] meaning of the words she used, which would make the sense clear. She robustly denied accusations of deliberate obscurity[22], instead admonishing her frustratingly dull readership by invoking the divine words spoken to St Francis of Assisi as to how the Rule for his order should be observed:

> And so I say, not within the suppositious contexts of religion
> but within the personally actual contexts of poetry: literally,
> literally, literally, without gloss, without gloss, without gloss.
> So read, so exist... .[23]

During the late twenties and early thirties, Riding demonstrated increasing signs of a disturbance in her social relationships: belief in her own 'holiness' or divinity[24]; insistence on exercising a far-reaching authority over those who came close to her[25]; antagonism to those who resisted this authority, such as Norman Cameron, Jacob Bronowski and Basil Liddell Hart[26]; and a political ambition based on her belief, expounded in *The World and Ourselves*, that the world could be saved from 'disorder' if it followed her proposals for individual moral reform and for teaching English to foreigners, English being the most suitable language for 'truth-telling' as well as the most naturally 'dignified' language[27]. Even English, however, had severe limitations as a medium for expressing truth, and it was out of her political discussions with Graves and others at the time of writing *The World and Ourselves* that she saw the need for a new dictionary based on 'exact meaning', which would be defined by herself for the good of society[28].

Riding's use of language in her own poetry is symptomatic of her concern with the meaning and definition of words which have become 'tainted' by mis-use[29]. Her deceptively simple vocabulary misleads the reader into expecting an equally simple

'meaning', for she frequently imbues words with a sense which is either personal or depends on a definition other than that of current colloquial use. Thus the principal difficulty her work presents to the reader is that her plain language conceals an obscure, or what she might call its 'literal' meaning. This was acknowledged as the explanation of her 'difficulty' by Schuyler Jackson, who wrote: 'For this reason, language that would seem clear in Shakespeare or Mother Goose may seem obscure in Laura Riding'[30]. In an attempt to 'explain' her poems in 1972[31], Riding warned that readers should not imagine that her poetry contained 'what are called "symbols"'[32]. Taking her use of the word 'woman' as an example of her linguistic technique, she explained:

> My use [of the word] was literal on a large scale. I meant the common identity, woman, of women. I conceived of women under this identity as agency of the intrinsic unity-nature of being, and knew myself as of the personality of woman - as of this identity: and I endeavoured to make poems include expressly the sense of this as it was actively present in me.[33]

In 1980 she added a further explanation of her 'poetic verbal practice', stating that her 'conception' of poetry was as 'a course in which to unite, with all my virtue of comprehensive, personally general, sincerity of dedication, the intellectual, the moral, the spiritual trails of the journey to truth - to the plane of utterance on which human speaking spoke the language of being with a full,

universal explicitness of sense'. Such a course implied 'a level of word-use categorically *higher* that the "ordinary"'[34]. This problem with meaning in Riding's poems might be compared to the 'dislocation' of meaning that Eliot detected in Milton's poetry, in which 'inner meaning is separated from the surface, and so tends to become something occult'[35].

'The Cool Web': language and evasion

The problem of language as a means of defining and expressing experience, which so preoccupied Riding, was the subject of 'The Cool Web', one of Graves's most ambitious poems. In the poem Graves returns to the possibility of madness, which he had feared during and immediately after the war. Here he sees language and its ability to 'control' the nature of experience as a defence of sanity:

> Children are dumb to say how hot the day is,
> How hot the scent is of the summer rose,
> How dreadful the black wastes of evening sky,
> How dreadful the tall soldiers drumming by.
>
> But we have speech, that cools the hottest sun,
> And speech that dulls the hottest rose's scent.
> We spell away the overhanging night,
> We spell away the soldiers and the fright.

There's a cool web of language winds us in,
Retreat from too much gladness, too much fear:
We grow sea-green at last and coldly die
In brininess and volubility.

But if we let our tongues lose self-possession,
Throwing off language and its wateriness
Before our death, instead of when death comes,
Facing the brightness of the children's day,
Facing the rose, the dark sky and the drums,
We shall go mad no doubt and die that way.

In an interesting essay on this poem in *English Studies*[36], Jean-Paul Forster claims that Graves's concept of language in 'The Cool Web' anticipates in a remarkable way the conclusions of twentieth century English analytical philosophers such as G. E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, A. J. Ayer and J. C. Austin. Both Graves and the analytical philosophers believe that 'one of the functions of language is to describe our experiences':

> From this resulted a change of perspective in philosophical studies. The business of philosophy came to be viewed as one of clarification rather than discovery, and its subject matter became increasingly our thought or language rather than the facts they expressed... . In Graves's poems, the investigation and clarification of facts is at the same time an investigation of language itself.[37]

Forster's reading of the poem is undermined, however, by his assumption that the web is necessarily a spider's, for this

assumption leads him to interpret the absence of the spider as a declaration of agnosticism. It seems to me that the web cannot possibly be a spider's, for a spider's web does not 'wind in' its prey, being a static trap which 'entangles' or 'envelops' (*OED*) insects to hold them ready for the spider's attack. Also, the natural element of Graves's web appears to be water rather than air, it has a 'watery clasp' and language itself has a 'wateriness' in the poem. This makes it hard to conceive of the web in any way other than the somewhat vague figurative sense implied by definition 2c in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: 'a subtly woven snare or entanglement'.

Forster states that the poem constitutes a 'reappraisal of the role of language and particularly of its relation to experience'[38], and one might usefully both limit and extend this, by saying that it reappraises language as the point of contact between the poet's self and that self's experience, given Ayers's definition that 'a self must be held to be a logical construction out of sense experience'[39]. In 'The Cool Web' Graves shows the process of that 'logical construction' at work, as the self is not simply defined by experience, but by the way it interprets experience and presents or explains experience to itself. This process places more importance on the adjective than the noun - on 'hot' rather than 'scent', on 'dreadful' rather than 'soldiers' - for the adjective determines the nature of the impact of experience on the poet. In this Graves is concerned not so much with the knowledge of

reality, but with interpreting his experience of it, and understanding his relation to it.

One of the central images of this poem, the child smelling a rose and putting a name to that smell, recalls Marvell's 'The Picture of Little T. C. in a Prospect of Flowers' (just as the topographical positioning of 'To M. in India' is reminiscent of 'To His Coy Mistress'). In Marvell's poem a time-conscious, language-conscious adult considers the unconscious innocence of a child taming a wild nature:

> In the green grass she loves to lie,
> And there with her fair aspect tames
> The wilder flowers, and gives them names,
> But only with the roses plays;
>   And does them tell
> What colour best becomes them, and what smell.

The natural world in Marvell's poem is beneficent - T. C.'s 'fair aspect' is enough in itself to tame its wilder aspects, while the rose is the gentlest of all flowers. In 'The Cool Web', however, nature is indifferent and threatening, and in a later (1938) revision the rose's hostility is emphasised by describing its scent as 'cruel' instead of 'hot'. Graves's child is unable to 'tame' the flowers or any other aspect of her menacing environment. Her only defence is the human ability to interpret this experience through language,

though as a child she has yet to acquire the necessary vocabulary to do this.

In the poem, adults have the ability to control, at least to some extent, their relationship with reality, and their instinct is to 'dull' experience, 'cool' its 'hot' intensity with the protective 'cool web' of language:

> There's a cool web of language winds us in,
> Retreat from too much gladness, too much fear...

The rather sinister conclusion of this is that language is used to distort the nature of 'truth', because the poet is only able to maintain his sanity by convincing himself of untruth. He 'spells away' the true nature of the day or the soldiers, manipulating them through language to convince himself that they are less hostile, less dreadful than they really are. It is, therefore, wilful self-deception. Four manuscript drafts of the poem are extant[40] and the first of these (which begins with 'Language invades the inexpressible', struck through) includes a direct comment on this 'deception' through language, again crossed out on the manuscript:

> ~~And when they reach to~~ And now there's
> ~~And they deceive by~~ language ~~makes~~ cools ~~the~~ our

'Human kind cannot bear very much reality'[41], but despite the poet's reassurance of himself, reality - existing independent of the poet's description of it - continues hostile and threatening. Thus poetry cannot change the world, only our perception of it, and 'The Cool Web' is a stark acknowledgement by Graves that he manipulates his perception of the world to avoid its reality. The image of the soldiers 'drumming by' reminds the reader that the origin of this tendency to avoidance was the war, and that Graves only managed to cope with the extreme experience of the war by rationalising it through speech and the written word. Acknowledgement of this evasion in 'The Cool Web' signals his determination 'to learn to tell the truth' and thus avoid 'brininess and volubility', the cold death inevitable for those who deceive themselves about the true nature of the world. However, the absence of a positive choice between the heat of reality and coldness of death, other than the coolness of a web of evasion and self-deception, is at best a bleak perception of the 'good existence' and perhaps also an implicit admission of its impossibility.

Poetry and 'experience'

Riding undertook to teach Graves to 'ratiocinate clearly'[42] and 'to say exactly' what he meant in matters concerning poetry[43], but

the difficulty of anyone doing this with a language whose meaning was not only imprecise but constantly shifting was a problem which increasingly vexed her. In 1934 she began work, with Graves's assistance, on a dictionary of 'related meanings' which it was hoped would 'liberate' people from 'the confused associations of usage in which the meanings of words are entangled'[44]. Riding insisted that 'the meaning of words... had to be known with perfect distinctness before they could be used with perfect truthfulness'[45], and that the 'exact' use of language was inherently connected to a language user's spiritual well-being, as she wrote in the 1969 preface to *The World and Ourselves*:

> I have now to add to this that to know their inward nature they must know their words.[46]

When, in 1939, Graves and Riding parted company, Riding ceased to write poetry, rejecting it as an inappropriate medium for expressing truth because 'sensuous satisfaction in the words is [its] given, imposed, first interest'[47]; she devoted herself instead to tying down meaning in language, continuing work on the dictionary which was now retitled 'Rational Meaning: A New Foundation for the Definition of Words', in collaboration with her husband Schuyler Jackson (unpublished)[48].

Riding's views on the nature and purpose of poetry inspired Graves in the middle and late 1920s and gave his poetry a new

sense of direction at a time when he himself had lost his way. She insisted on the inseparability of life and art; 'poetry' was 'the good existence', and 'to live in, by, for the reasons of poems is to habituate oneself to the good existence'[49]. It was an acceptance of this that led Graves, after 1926, to 'struggle' 'to be a poet in more than the literary sense'[50]. In an essay written before she came to England, Riding set out a view of poetry which was both original and radical and which had a profound influence on Graves's thinking. In 'A Prophecy or a Plea' she argued that poetry was a way of giving new birth to 'barren life' and providing 'meaning' to 'experience', by creating 'a symbol of peace and reconciliation between the inner nature of a man and the external world without him'[51]. Graves must have read this essay with some rueful reflection on the present chaos of his own personal life and the lack of 'order' in his own 'inner being' still racked by the effects of neurasthenia. For Riding the poet should not react passively to the experience of life so much as control and influence experience through his or her art. She rejected the 'retreat' into 'the penumbra of introspection', the form of 'avoidance' that had characterised Graves's previous response to life, and instead 'insisted' that the poet faced a 'challenge':

> ...the birth of a new poetic bravery that shall exchange insight
> for outsight and envisage life not as an influence upon the
> soul but the soul as an influence upon life.[52]

'Disintegration' and 'self-fashioning'

Riding's statement that 'development comes through self-exercise, not through being hammered upon'[53], struck a deep chord in a poet still traumatised by the nightmare of war and who had been searching through his poetry for a means of reconstructing a self 'hammered upon' by extreme 'experience'. Her view of poetry offered Graves the hope that it was possible to use poetry as a means of shaping and taking control of experience, and refashioning the sense of his own identity. The story of his life up until 1929, he wrote in *Goodbye To All That* (in a passage omitted from the 1957 revision) was one of 'gradual disintegration'[54]. To undertake the necessary restructuring of his personality Graves sought direction from Riding, placing himself willingly and completely under her authority.

Stephen Greenblatt, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, establishes a set of 'governing conditions' common to literary 'self-fashioning'[55] which provides a useful comparison for assessing Graves's own attempts to reconstruct his sense of identity. Greenblatt claims that writers such as More, Wyatt, Spenser, Marlowe and Shakespeare were 'all displaced in significant ways from a stable, inherited social world, and they all manifest in powerful and influential form aspects of Renaissance self-

fashioning'[56]. In a period of accelerated social and cultural change, the 'structures that govern the generation of identities' also change[57], according to Greenblatt, and as a consequence allow individuals greater freedom and scope in shaping their identities. The 'lost generation' of writers who survived the First World War experienced a similarly disturbing rapidity of change and disruption, and it was in the context of this that Graves found himself having to readjust to a radically and suddenly altered environment by reconstructing the relationship between what Riding called the 'inner nature' of the individual self and the 'chaotic' 'external world'[58].

The extended process of personal reconstruction and recovery from neurasthenia which governed Graves's post-war development accords closely with the 'pattern' of 'self-fashioning' identified by Greenblatt in his 'conditions', which include social mobility, 'submission to an absolute power or authority', and development in relation to an 'other', which is 'something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile'[59]. Although Graves shared the middle-class mobility common to Greenblatt's writers, he was not, like them, 'upwardly mobile'. He lacked social ambition and sought instead a bohemian freedom from structure in direct opposition to his bourgeois family's high social expectations, and it is in this conflict between self and family that Graves differs most from More *et al*, for unlike them Graves felt his personal identity was rooted in 'the identity of a clan'[60], for he

saw himself as the victim of external conditioning by two families whose markedly different character traits accounted for an internal conflict in his own personality. In *Goodbye To All That* he devoted considerable attention to the effect of these contradictory influences on the formation of his own personality. On the one hand the Irish Graves family 'have good minds for purposes like examinations, writing graceful Latin verse, filling in forms, and solving puzzles'[61]. They have 'a good eye for ball games, and a graceful style', of which Graves inherited the former but not the latter, for his mother's family were 'entirely without style and I went that way'. There is a coldness 'which is anti-sentimental to the point of insolence, a necessary check to the goodness of heart from which my mother's family suffers'[62]. As regards their social relationships and their attitude to government and authority, the Graves's remain 'loyal to the British governing class to which they belong', but are individualists, while the German von Ranke's 'regard their membership of the corresponding class in Germany as a sacred trust enabling them to do the more responsible work in the service of humanity'[63]. Graves inherited characteristics from both sides of his family, as is natural, but although he preferred his German relations to his Irish relations[64], *Goodbye To All That* is essentially an account of a conscious, even obsessive, determination to refashion his identity in such a way as to establish its independence of either family's conditioning.

Riding's 'authority' and the genesis of the White Goddess as 'the source of truth'

For Greenblatt's Renaissance writers the external 'authority' was either God, a sacred text, or an institution (either the Church or a 'military administration')[65]. Graves's first 'authority' (after his parents) was undoubtedly the regiment from 1914 to 1918, but in 1926 Laura Riding became this external 'authority'. When that happened, Graves's 'other' became a male rival for his authority's sexual and emotional favours: first the Irish poet Geoffrey Phibbs and then Schuyler Jackson. Graves was both jealous of his rivals and despised them, dismissing them, exactly in accordance with Greenblatt's formula, for their 'falseness and negativity'[66] in poems such as 'Lack' and 'Beware Madam'.

Submission to an 'all-powerful' authority and competition with a rival or 'other' is an essential component of what Graves describes as 'the single poetic theme' in *The White Goddess*. Knowledge of and struggle with this 'other self' is necessary for the pursuit of self-knowledge and of ultimate 'truth', represented in mythological terms by the muse herself:

> The Theme, briefly, is the antique story, which falls into thirteen chapters and an epilogue, of the birth, life, death and

> resurrection of the God of the Waxing Year; the central chapters concern the God's losing battle with the God of the Waning Year for the love of the capricious and all-powerful Threefold Goddess, their mother, bride and layer-out. The poet identifies himself with the God of the Waxing Year and his Muse with the Goddess; the rival is his blood-brother, his other self, his weird. All true poetry - true by Housman's practical test - celebrates some incident or scene in this very ancient story, and the three main characters are so much a part of our racial inheritance that they not only assert themselves in poetry but recur on occasions of emotional stress in the form of dreams, paranoiac visions and delusions. The weird, or rival, often appears in nightmares as the tall, lean, dark-faced bed-side spectre, or Prince of the Air, who tries to drag the dreamer out through the window, so that he looks back and sees his body still lying rigid in bed; but he takes countless other malevolent or diabolic or serpent-like forms.[67]

The structure of Graves's personal relationships would be of merely biographical interest if it were not for the fact that he formulated them into a personal mythology which governed his artistic practice. After his break with Riding in 1939, he married a woman different from either Riding or Nicholson in that she did not assume authority over Graves and their relationship was not hierarchical or based on an imbalance of power in the way his previous relationships had been. For the first time since school, where George Mallory's wife had already observed Graves's tendency to hero-worship and his readiness to let other people make his decisions for him[68], Graves found himself without a

mentor or external 'authority' figure. It was, significantly, shortly after this loss of an authority that Graves worked out his theories of the White Goddess, in which he constructed a mythology of ultimate authority whose divinity was more conclusive than Riding's self-proclaimed 'holiness'.

Graves was initially bewildered by Riding's sudden hostility to him and her 'renunciation' of poetry in 1939, which he interpreted in terms of a personal breakdown. Shortly after their acrimonious separation he wrote a brief account of her achievement in what, in the circumstances, seemed magnanimous terms:

> It was in 1927 that Laura Riding, a young American who had recently come to Europe, first published her poems and critical work in England. Wiping her slate clean of literary and domestic affiliations with America, she became for the next twelve years the best of 'good Europeans'; the Americans only knew her as 'the highest apple on the British intellectual tree'. In England she was assailed as a 'leg-puller', 'crossword puzzle setter', 'Futurist', 'tiresome intellectualist', and so on: none of her books sold more than a few dozen copies, nor did she ever (as Gertrude Stein did after the Wall Street crash, in her chatty *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and during her American lecture tour), consent to give the larger public what it really wanted. She was the one poet of the time who spun, like Arachne, from her own vitals without any discoverable philosophical or literary derivations: and the only one who achieved an

> unshakable synthesis. Unshakable, that is, if the premiss of her unique personal authority were granted... .[69]

This last phrase carries the hint of a suggestion that he was beginning to accept that there was, perhaps, a flaw in Riding's perfection after all, and that his granting of her 'unique personal authority' for thirteen years had been a mistake. He had earlier questioned this authority in one of their collaborative pieces for *Epilogue III*, called 'A Private Correspondence on Reality', but in the most respectful and submissive terms:

> I am aware that your consciousness is of a final quality and that you are yet someone immediate and actual... . But there is nothing fantastic in my conviction that you think finally: because the recognition your thought involves in me is not blind, but becomes clearer at every step... . But there does remain, if not for me, at least for others, the question of practical authority: how is one to be sure that what you say is so?[70]

Although this was a merely rhetorical questioning designed to allow Riding a further opportunity for a megalomaniac assertion of what she claimed was her unique hold on true knowledge and 'final' reality, there is a sense of Graves protesting too much in asserting that he is 'not blind' and that there is 'nothing fantastic' in his belief in her. Authority is the key word which recurs in Graves's own descriptions of his relationship with Riding, and it is the combination of this authority with her role as muse, critic

and sexual partner which he recreated in 'fashioning' his own 'authority' in the mythical persona of the White Goddess.

In retrospect, the absence of any discussion of Laura Riding in *The White Goddess*, an 'historical' account of 'true poetry', seems extraordinary. She is mentioned only briefly on two occasions. First, Graves quotes her lines explaining why she destroyed poems he had addressed to her:

> Forgive me giver, if I destroy the gift:
> It is so nearly what would please me
> I cannot but perfect it.

This, Graves claims, demonstrates that the Muse can never be 'completely satisfied' and that the poet 'cannot continue to be a poet if he feels that he has made a permanent conquest' of her.[71] His second mention of Riding is to pair her with Rimbaud in remarking that 'there is no disgrace in being an ex-poet, if only one makes a clean break with poetry'[72].

The absence of any serious consideration of Riding or her work in the book has not deterred critics from considering her role in its creation. The most persuasive of these critics is Randall Jarrell, who remarked perceptively if light-heartedly that in writing *The White Goddess* Graves became 'his own Laura Riding'[73]. His thesis that the 'myth' of the White Goddess had originated in Graves's own subconscious infuriated Graves, who

retaliated in a lecture given in New York in 1957[74]. He roundly denied Jarrell's claim that his 'world-picture' was a projection of his unconscious on the universe, insisting that having made a systematic study of Freud he did not need his work analysed for him, for he knew 'exactly' what his poems 'were about', while his theories of the White Goddess were based on historical and anthropological study:

> My world picture is not a psychological one, nor do I indulge in idle myth-making and award diplomas to my converts. It is enough for me to quote authentic myths and give them historical sense...[75]

The psychological speculation inherent in Jarrell's critical method makes it unreliable, despite his claim that 'few poets have made better "pathological sense"' than Graves[76]. Nevertheless, the biographical evidence that has emerged since Jarrell's essay makes it clear, even to a cautious reader, that in his description of the White Goddess mythology Graves is rationalising a deeply traumatic experience in describing those elements of Riding's character which were of crucial influence on his attempts to reconstruct his personal and artistic identity after its post-war disintegration. The Goddess has both divine and human characteristics, as Riding had for Graves, and in her female aspect she is fickle, cruel and destructive towards her poet-lover, the price of whose poetry is personal ruin at her hands. The Goddess is first and foremost, Graves explained in *The White*

Goddess 'the source of truth', and it is communion with this truth which compensates for the inevitable 'death' inherent in her 'embrace', for 'the poet is in love with... truth'[77]. Thus the pursuit of truth in which he and Riding had been engaged, first in joint collaboration and then with Graves relegated to a 'disciple' role, could continue unabated in a different form in which Graves was autonomous, thanks to his 'discovery' of the Goddess. 'The good experience' that was poetry could now be lived independent of the 'personal authority' of any one enlightened individual authority, who herself had claimed to be the source of truth, for the poet had learned to distinguish between the 'all-powerful' and divine Goddess and her mere 'human representative'[78]. His error, therefore, had been to mistake Riding, who was an embodiment of the muse, for the real thing. She was not, after all, like Arachne spinning 'from her own vitals without any discoverable philosophical or literary derivation', but part of an ancient and predictable cycle which the true poet is doomed to tread in his pursuit of poetic truth. By interpreting his experience at Riding's hands in this way, Graves could recover mental and emotional balance, and see meaning and purpose in the experience rather than humiliation and disillusion which might otherwise have threatened. However, in a poem which rationalises a similar experience with a later muse, he admits that it is an inevitably traumatic process despite its predictability:

> This they know well: the Goddess yet abides.

> Though each new lovely woman whom she rides,
> Straddling her neck a year or two or three,
> Should sink beneath such weight of majesty
> And, groping back to humankind, gainsay
> The headlong power that whitened all her way
> With a broad track of trefoil - leaving you,
> Her chosen lover, ever again thrust through
> With daggers, your purse rifled, your rings gone -
> Nevertheless they call you to live on
> To parley with the pure oracular dead,
> To hear the wild pack whimpering overhead
> To watch the moon tugging at her cold tides.
> Woman is mortal woman. She abides.

This constitutes Graves's principal rejoinder to Jarrell's taunt that he had become his own Laura Riding. Riding, he admitted, was 'the woman in whom the Goddess was once resident for me'[79], but she had 'abdicated'[80], leaving him to pursue his devotion to the Goddess elsewhere.

Theory of 'inspiration' and later practice after 1946

The lecture rebutting Jarrell became, in a modified form, the 1960 postcript to *The White Goddess*, in which he elaborates a theory of inspiration based on his own practice:

> Since the source of poetry's creative power is not scientific intelligence, but inspiration - however this may be explained

> by scientists - one may surely attribute inspiration to the Lunar Muse, the oldest and most convenient European term for this source? By ancient tradition, the White Goddess becomes one with her human representative - a priestess, a prophetess, a queen-mother. No Muse-poet grows conscious of the Muse except by experience of a woman in whom the Goddess is to some degree resident; just as no Apollonian poet can perform his proper function unless he lives under a monarchy or a quasi-monarchy. A Muse-poet falls in love, absolutely, and his true love is for him the embodiment of the Muse. As a rule, the power of absolutely falling in love soon vanishes; and, as a rule, because the woman feels embarrassed by the spell she exercises over her poet-lover and repudiates it; he, in disillusion, turns to Apollo who, at least, can provide him with a livelihood and intelligent entertainment, and reneges before his middle 'twenties. But the real, perpetually obsessed Muse-poet distinguishes between the Goddess as manifest in the supreme power, glory, wisdom and love of woman, and the individual woman whom the Goddess may make her instrument for a month, a year, seven years, or even more. The Goddess abides; and perhaps he will again have knowledge of her through his experience of another woman.[81]

Graves was to rely on such 'knowledge' through 'experience' as a means of preserving lyrical inspiration and avoiding 'Apollo', for the rest of his career. From 1950 to 1974, he was to pursue inspiration through relationships with four successive 'muse-possessed women'[82]. These were, for the most part at least, 'chaste' and quixotic attempts to preserve the 'romantic illusions' in love which had characterised his schoolboy homosexual relationships, until they had become 'complicated by cynicism

and foulness'[83]. It was a reversion to the sort of sentimental idealistic love expressed for 'Dick' in *Goodbye To All That*, and this sentimentality - which Sassoon had observed in 1918 was one of Graves's weaknesses[84] - for the most part mars those poems which record happiness or 'blind innocence' in love, and makes them seem facile and unconvincing, such as 'Reconciliation':

> The storm is done, the sun shines out,
> The blackbird calls again
> With bushes, trees and long hedgerows
> Still twinkling bright with rain.
>
> Sweet, since you now can trust your heart
> As surely as I can,
> Be still the sole woman I love
> With me for your sole man.
>
> For though we hurt each other once
> In youthful blindness, yet
> A man must learn how to forgive
> What women soon forget.

Although cast as a 'song', the rhythm of the verse is stilted, the language bland, the ending glib and facile. 'Be still the sole woman I love' is a startling descent into cliché, while the addressing of his lover as 'sweet' recalls the 'lace valentine' literariness that Graves had earlier accused Sassoon of[85]. In the final group of poems, addressed to a muse much younger than

himself, the tone becomes almost pathetic as in 'Two Crucial Generations':

> Two crucial generations parted them,
> Though neither chargeable as an offence -
> Nor could she dare dismiss an honest lover
> For no worse crime than mere senility...

A reluctance to accept age is a recurrent theme in this last group of poems, such as 'The Queen of Time', 'Age Gap', 'Beatrice and Dante' and 'Seven Fresh Years', yet apart from the honesty and pathos achieved in 'Nightmare of Senility' and 'At the Gate', Graves's treatment of age is evasive to the point of self-delusion, as in 'Timeless Meeting' where the 'magic' of love enables the poet to transcend time, old age and death:

> To have attained an endless, timeless meeting
> By faith in the stroke which first engaged us,
> Driving two hearts improbably together
> Against all faults of history
> And bodily disposition -

'Stroke' here is the sudden, dramatic, and unexpected nature of love as portrayed in the late poems. It is 'swifter than reason and despite reason'. Such 'contentment in love', however, was only transitory, as each successive muse soon 'abdicated' or committed 'suicide', just as 'Dick' had done when he abandoned the 'truth' of Graves's love and was caught propositioning a Canadian

soldier more worldly-wise than Graves[86]. At each disappointment, pain and anxiety provided fuel for a number of ironic, urbane and robust reflections on the vagaries of love, such as 'Symptoms of Love', 'Spoils' and 'Between Moon and Moon'. However, even these bitter reflections contain a note of unquenchable optimism in the face of adversity, as each emotional defeat was seen as a moral victory and the opportunity for a new test of loyalty and truth:

> In the last sad watches of night
> Hardly a sliver of light will remain
> To edge the guilty shadow of a waned moon
> That dawn must soon devour.
> Thereafter, another
> Crescent queen shall arise with power -
> So wise a beauty never yet seen, say I:
> A true creature of moon, though not the same
> In nature, name or feature -
> Her innocent eye rebuking inconstancy
> As if Time itself should die and disappear.
>
> So was it ever. She is here again, I sigh.

A state of almost permanent submission to a female authority had become essential in Graves's eyes to his survival as a poet. The reckless exposure to personal suffering, for both himself and his family, that this entailed, was a repetition of his decision in the early twenties not to seek a psychiatric cure for his neurasthenia, for fear that a cure would adversely affect his art:

> Somehow I thought that the power of writing poetry, which was more important to me than anything else I did, would disappear if I allowed myself to get cured... . It seemed to me less important to be well than to be a good poet.[87]

Graves felt a superstitious need for suffering on which he believed his art depended for its existence, and the conscious reenactment of what in *The White Goddess* he called the 'single poetic theme', was a means of formalising and rationalising this suffering. 'Tranquility is of no poetical use', he stated in the *Paris Review* interview[88], but he was also aware that the deliberate cultivation of 'inspiration' was itself problematic, and made it the subject of one of his lectures as Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1962. The 'main problem', he stated, is that 'the writing of true poems happens so unpredictably that the poet is beset by the temptation to write when not in the mood'. This was of course the same lesson as he had learned in 1921 from Thomas Hardy, who thought poems should be 'always accidental'[89]. The impatient poet, however, while knowing this, is still tempted to 'induce' this mood 'by withdrawing to a glade or quiet, book-filled study, or by violent adventure among corsairs, alguazils, barmecides, and their modern equivalent':

> It cannot be. No poet has yet solved the main problem: how to maintain the gift of certitude. Always to be in love: that is one recommendation. To treat money and fame with equal nonchalance, is another. To remain independent, is a third.

> To prize personal honour, is a fourth. To make the English language one's constant study, is a fifth... . Yet lightning strikes where and when it wills. No one ever knows. It is easy to take up a pen at random and plead: 'I'm just keeping my hand in'. But nine-tenths of what passes as English poetry is the product of either careerism, or keeping one's hand in: a choice between vulgarity and banality.[90]

Unfortunately, Graves did not heed his own warning and in the years after 1960 his poetry began a slow, gradual decline into formulaic repetitiveness. The description of *Poems 1965-1968* by the *Listener* as 'shabby, peeling, Georgian stucco' was blunt though not inaccurate, and clearly upset Graves[91]. By this time, however, it would appear that even he had begun to doubt the true worth of his late poems, commenting ironically that *Love Respelt,* a volume published in 1965, should have been titled 'Love Mis-spelt'[92], and writing to Ruth Fainlight in February 1969:

> ...my trouble is that I know too much of the *craft* of poetry, so that even non-poems read beautifully. But O how *bored* I can be, reading them a month later![93]

He had, it seemed, reverted to the 'preoccupation with the physical side of poetry' which had been the overriding feature, or defect, of his work before its reform under the stern critical eye of Laura Riding.

The predominant language of the later 'White Goddess poems' is defiantly romantic and anachronistic, and expresses an antipathy

towards modern, urbanised, mechanized society, and a nostalgia for a life which was 'still ruled by the old agricultural cycle'[94] - a life which he felt he had found in Deià, a small mountain village on the more remote northwest coast of Mallorca where he and Riding settled in 1929 and to which he returned in 1946. Nostalgia for a pre-industrialised world encouraged a romantic conservatism implicit in poems such as 'Three Words Only', and which became increasingly characteristic of Graves's poetry in the 1960s. G. S. Fraser observed that Graves's 'long exile... in *The White Goddess* has paradoxically crystallized certain engagingly old-fashioned literary mannerisms and attitudes, extremely English ones, which if he had stayed at home [in England] would have been eroded'[95]. For Fraser this was a positive benefit to Graves's poetry, but even Graves's skill and integrity could not always save this unfashionable vocabulary of love from mawkish sentimentality:

> Sweetheart, I love you
> Here in the world's eye
> And always shall do
> With a perfect faith
> In three words only.

The failure of the late love poems is perhaps not surprising given that they describe biographical experience which has been consciously contrived for the purpose of 'inspiration', but their failure should not detract from the real achievement of Graves's

later work, the series of satires and mostly ironic interrogations of selfhood such as 'The Face in the Mirror', 'All Except Hannibal', and 'My Ghost', and which culminated in the more poignant 'Nightmare of Senility' and 'At the Gate', written at the very end of his career.

This latter poem finally faces up to what Graves had for so long feared, loss of inspiration and the drying-up of his prolific output. Ironically, however, this admission of bankruptcy produces a more successful poem than any of the artificial love lyrics constructed out of the systematic and theoretical courtship of a 'personal muse'. It is less perfectly 'crafted' than any of these, being written in the somewhat shaky hand of a poet about to enter his eightieth decade and conscious of the onset of possible arteriosclerosis, but through its honesty, directness and emotional force, the poem acts out an ironic denial of its own claim to artistic sterility:

> Where are poems? Why do I now write none?
> This can mean no lack of pens, nor lack of love,
> But need perhaps of an increased magic -
> Where have my ancient powers suddenly gone?

The bleak conclusion Graves arrives at in this, virtually the last poem he ever wrote, is that the final 'reward' of his 'service' is the ultimate betrayal of abandonment, though even this does not drive him to question the validity of the ideology, or doubt the

'existence', of the Goddess 'cult'. The blame remains entirely his for having dared to 'court the Queen in her high silk pavilion'[96], which made her desertion of him inevitable and entirely in accordance with myth.

NOTES

1. *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xxiii.

2. G. Plimpton, ed., *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* (Secker and Warburg, 1977), p. 63. The interview with Graves was by Peter Buckman and William Fifield.

2. Six holograph drafts are in the Buffalo collection. The first two drafts are titled 'Two O'clock in the Sandhills'.

4. Lawrence's novel was originally published privately in Florence in 1928.

5. *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, p. 88.

6. A technique Riding herself derived from the poems of Gertrude Stein. In *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* Riding and Graves commented on Stein's work, noting that her use of repetition 'has the effect of breaking down the possible historical senses still inherent in the words' (p. 285). In this way she 'sterilized' words until they were 'exhausted of history and meaning' (p. 287).

7. *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xv.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid*, p. xxi.

10. Preface to her *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, and London: Cassell, 1938), reprinted in *The Poems of Laura Riding* by Laura (Riding) Jackson (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1980), p. 407.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid*, p. 414.

13. *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xv.

14. GTAT29, p. 441.

15. *The Crowning Privilege*, p. 138.

16. *Ibid.* See also Yeats's letter to Dorothy Wellesley of May 22, 1936:

> I wrote to-day to Laura Riding, with whom I carry on a slight correspondence, that her school was too thoughtful, reasonable and truthful, that poets were good liars who never forgot that the Muses were women who liked the embrace of gay warty lads. I wonder if she knows that warts are considered by the Irish peasantry a sign of sexual power? (*The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. A. Wade, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954, p. 857.)

17. *The Faber Book of Modern Verse*, ed. Michael Roberts (Faber and Faber, 1936), reissued in 1982, ed. Janet Adam Smith, with Roberts's original Introduction, p. 9.

18. From her Preface to *Laura Riding Selected Poems: In Five Sets* (Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 12.

19. A phrase much used, with a certain condescension, in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. Chapter One is 'Modernist Poetry and the Plain Reader's Rights', and Chapter Four, 'The Unpopularity of Modernist Poetry with the Plain Reader'. Riding's and Graves's 'Conclusion' was that 'the plain reader's approach to poetry is adequate only for poems as weak as the critical effort that he is ready to apply to them' (p. 24). As for the 'plain reader's rights', these are 'presumably... whatever his intelligence is able to make them' (p. 25).

20. *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, p. 275.

21. From the 1938 'Preface', in *The Poems of Laura Riding*, p. 413.

22. *Ibid*, pp. 408-409.

23. *Ibid*, p. 413.

24. RPG-2, p. 78.

25. T. S. Matthews, *Under the Influence* (As *Jacks or Better*, New York: Macmillan, 1977), p. 130.

26. See MS-S, pp. 220-222, 225-226; also RPG-2, p. 256, and O'PREY-1, p. 244 (Liddell Hart to RG, 10 October 1936).

27. See Riding's Introduction to *The World and Ourselves* (Chatto and Windus, 1938), also RPG-2, pp. 285-287, MS-S, p. 304 and J. Wexler, *Laura Riding's Pursuit of Truth* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979), pp. 104-109. Wexler writes in defence of Riding's proposals for dealing with the international situation thus: 'Her specific suggestions were bound to seem frivolous or futile to people witnessing the immediate realities of Franco and Hitler. Yet she was not contemptible for putting forth her proposals. Her ability to ignore the ridicule she might incur in attempting to implement her convictions was a kind of courage' (p. 108). It was also, however, a

kind of extreme arrogance and demonstrated both a blindness to reality and a high-handed disregard for the opinions of others.

28. MS-S, p. 305, and Wexler, p. 109.

29. MS-S, p. 305.

30. Quoted by Riding in the 1980 Introduction to *The Poems of Laura Riding*, p. 12.

31. Riding, 'A Recording Explaining the Poems', for the Lamont Library, Harvard University (1972). Excerpts published in *The Poems of Laura Riding*, pp. 417-419.

32. *Ibid*, p. 417.

33. *Ibid*, p. 418.

34. The 1980 Introduction to *The Poems of Laura Riding*, p. 5. The emphasis is L. R.'s.

35. 'Milton' (1936), reprinted in *T. S. Eliot: Selected Prose*, ed. J. Hayward (Penguin, 1953), p. 129.

36. Jean-Paul Forster, 'The Gravesian Poem or Language Ill-Treated', *English Studies* 60 (1979): pp. 471-483.

37. *Ibid*, pp. 472-473.

38. *Ibid*, p. 472.

39. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Gollancz, 1936), p. 165.

40. In the Buffalo collection. Again, it is possible to order the drafts by working back from the published version. The first draft has a note scribbled on its back: 'Back about 7. Down the river in a boat'.

41. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* ('Burnt Norton').

42. O'PREY-1, letter to Sassoon, No Date [October 1926], p. 171.

43. O'PREY-1, letter to T. S. Eliot, No Date [September 1927], p. 177.

44. Riding's personal statement in *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement*, ed. S. J. Kunitz (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1955), p. 483.

45. *Ibid*.

46. Riding, unpublished 1969 'Preface' to *The World and Ourselves*, University Microfilms, quoted in Wexler, p. 109.

47. Riding, 'Continued for *Chelsea*', *Chelsea*, 12 September 1962, p. 9.

48. For Riding's description of this work see the Introduction to *Selected Poems: in Five Sets*, pp. 15-16, and *The Telling* (London: Athlone, and New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 69.

49. Riding, 1938 'Preface' in *The Poems of Laura Riding*, p. 413.

50. *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xiii.

51. Laura Riding Gottschalk, 'A Prophecy or a Plea', *The Reviewer*, April 1925, Vol. V, No. 2, p. 7.

52. *Ibid*, p. 3.

53. *Ibid*, p. 5.

54. GTAT29, p. 437.

55. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 8-9.

56. *Ibid*, pp. 7-8.

57. *Ibid*, p. 1.

58. Riding, 'A Prophecy or a Plea', p. 7.

59. Greenblatt, pp. 8-9.

60. *Ibid*.

61. GTAT29, p. 25.

62. *Ibid*.

63. *Ibid*.

64. *Ibid*, p. 19.

65. Greenblatt, p. 9.

66. *Ibid*.

67. *The White Goddess*, p. 24.

68. RPG-1, p. 173.

69. RG, *The Long Week-End*, p. 200.

70. *Epilogue III*, ed. Riding, Spring 1937, pp. 109-110.

71. *The White Goddess*, p. 444. Interestingly, neither mention of Riding is listed in the index.

72. *Ibid*, p. 456.

73. Randall Jarrell, 'Graves and the White Goddess', *The Third Book of Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), p. 110.

74. 'The White Goddess', Talk at the YMHA Center, New York, February 9, 1957. Published in *On Poetry: Collected Talks and Essays* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 227-247. Unpublished in the United Kingdom.

75. *Ibid*, p. 236.

76. Jarrell, p. 99.

77. *The White Goddess*, p. 448.

78. *Ibid*, p. 490.

79. *On Poetry*, p. 243.

80. *Ibid*.

81. *The White Goddess*, pp. 490-491.

82. For the correspondence relating to these relationships see O'PREY-2, pp. 82-83. See also MS-S, p. 440.

83. GTAT29, p. 66.

84. O'PREY-1, p. 101. Graves rebuts the charge in a letter to Sassoon, 26 August 1918.

85. *Ibid*, letter to Sassoon, No Date [September 1933], p. 229.

86. GTAT29, p. 220. Graves wrongly places this incident in October 1915. See O'PREY-1, p. 77 for the first mention of the incident in a letter to Marsh, 12 July 1917.

87. GTAT29, p. 381.

88. *The Paris Review Interviews*, p. 50.

89. GTAT29, p. 375.

90. *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, pp. 67-68.

91. O'PREY-2, letter to Ruth Fainlight, 13 January 1969, p. 277.

92. *Ibid*, p. 258.

93. *Ibid*, pp. 277-278.

94. *The White Goddess*, p. 14.

95. G. S. Fraser, *The Modern Writer and His World* (Verschoyle, 1953), pp. 290-291.

96. From 'The Face in the Mirror'.

CHAPTER SIX

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CHAPTER SIX

'A WHOLEHEARTED PROTEST':

STRATEGIES FOR INDEPENDENCE

'The Quids'

In *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, published in 1925, Graves quoted in full Riding's 'teasing'[1] poem 'The Quids', describing it as 'a satire on traditional metaphysics; and a first favourite with me'[2]. The same poem had been awarded the Nashville Prize in the December 1924 issue of *The Fugitive* and it is one of the most frequently praised of Riding's poems, partly because it is also one of the most accessible. Riding herself claimed that it was the object of much 'confused understanding'[3], due, Wexler believes, to critics failing to comprehend the 'fundamental view' of the poet that 'the diversity of nature concealed the universality of human character' and that 'human nature is uniform'[4]:

> The little quids, the monstrous quids,
> The everywhere, everything, always quids,
> The atoms of the Monoton,

Each turned an essence where it stood,
Ground a gisty dust from its neighbours' edges,
Until a powdery thoughtfall stormed in and out -
The cerebration of a slippery quid enterprise.

The playful lightness of the poem has perhaps encouraged its misreading. Inherent in her view of human existence as a uniform 'mass', made up of individual but identical atoms, is the implication that the poet, who was shortly to 'reveal' that she was 'more than human'[5], is somehow detached from this 'multitude'[6] and superior to it:

A quid here and there gyrated in place-position,
While many turned inside-out for the fun of it.
And a few refused to be anything but
Simple unpredicated copulatives.
Little by little, this commotion of quids,
By ones, by tens, by casual millions,
Squirming within the state of things,
The metaphysical acrobats,
The naked, immaterial quids,
Turned in on themselves
And came out all dressed -
Each similar quid of the inward same,
Each similar quid dressed in a different way,
The quids' idea of a holiday.

In the political analogy employed in *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, 'The Quids' is a 'left-wing' poem, because it is a protest against the 'dreariness, obscenity and standardisation' inherent in the 'present structure' of society[7]. In more than purely analogous

terms, however, it is political in its concept of society based on the assertion that human behaviour is essentially uniform and predictable. This assertion does not lead, as one might expect given her grounding in a socialist tradition[8], to a concept of society as a collective, or a denial of bourgeois individualism, because she also believed (a view which is implicit in 'The Quids' rather than explicit) that some people - many women and most poets, for example - were by nature more capable of independence of thought and action, and therefore had a responsibility to give a moral lead to society. This belief determined her political thinking in the lead up to the Second World War, set out in *The World and Ourselves* (1938), and although her polemical writing defines a position which is overtly anti-fascist, her belief in the inherent superiority of distinct classes of people, together with her call for a new morality (albeit an unsystematized and non-institutional one) has a sinister resonance when combined with her innate authoritarianism.

Riding's method of dehumanizing her subjects and giving a fragmented portrayal of experience, used so effectively in 'The Quids', was imitated by Graves in 'Sandhills', 'The Legs', 'Lollocks' and 'Nobody'. However, in 1925 he saw 'The Quids' primarily as a 'satire on traditional metaphysics', and although his praise of the poem has been criticised by Wexler as being 'for the wrong reasons'[9], and does seem at odds with Riding's own statement of 1972 that its 'spirit is not that of philosophical

enquiry'[10], Graves's comment is significant in suggesting that his own disillusion with metaphysics coincided with and was perhaps encouraged by, his growing interest in Riding's work.

'Warning to Children' and irrational thought

'Warning to Children' imitates 'The Quids' in adopting a deceptively playful tone to express the poet's frustration with traditional metaphysics and philosophy in their exploration of the meaning of life. The poem acts out the traditional game of 'Pass the Parcel', inviting the reader to unwrap each layer of 'a neat brown paper parcel' in pursuit of meaning, until finally the poet 'warns' that the reader can never get to the final parcel which contains the present. Instead, he will be condemned to unwrap endlessly the identical layers - emphasised at the end when the poet invites the reader to open the parcel yet again, despite having been 'warned'.

The problem starts because children 'dare to think' about the world around them. By making children the subject of the poem Graves not only achieves a playful tone (less ironic than the playful tone of 'The Quids') but shows the endless repetitiveness of successive generations seeking to solve the same problem. The opening apostrophe establishes the discourse within the poem as

that of a father issuing a stern warning to his children to desist from activity which he perceives as harmful to them. Their natural curiosity has led them to explore the nature of 'all the many largeness, smallness, fewness' of the 'single only / Endless world in which you say / You live'. The poet's doubt as to whether they really do live in such a 'world', or can justifiably claim to know that they inhabit the material environment they perceive through their senses, exposes his own entrapment in Cartesian uncertainty. In a 1938 revision of the poem (*Collected Poems 1938*) the description of the world was altered to emphasise its wonder and mystery for the children. 'Largeness, smallness, fewness' expresses the materialness of the world, but an alteration to 'greatness, rareness, muchness' imbues that material with value. In its revised form the poem has acquired a justified reputation, with Donald Davie calling it 'one of the finest and most extended' of Graves's 'riddles', as well as one of the 'hardest' (he himself does not attempt an answer), and 'just about the most ambitious poem Graves has ever written'[11]:

> Children, if you dare to think
> Of the greatness, rareness, muchness,
> Fewness of this precious only
> Endless world in which you say
> You live, you think of things like this:
> Blocks of slate enclosing dappled
> Red and green, enclosing tawny
> Yellow nets, enclosing white
> And black acres of dominoes,

Where a neat brown paper parcel
Tempts you to untie the string.
In the parcel a small island,
On the island a large tree,
On the tree a husky fruit.
Strip the husk and cut the rind off:
In the centre you will see
Blocks of slate enclosed by dappled
Red and green, enclosed by tawny
Yellow nets, enclosed by white
And black acres of dominoes,
Where the same brown paper parcel -
Children, leave the string untied!
For who dares undo the parcel
Finds himself at once inside it,
On the island, in the fruit,
Blocks of slate about his head,
Finds himself enclosed by dappled
Green and red, enclosed by yellow
Tawny nets, enclosed by black
And white acres of dominoes,
But the same brown paper parcel
Still untied upon his knee.
And, if he then should dare to think
Of the fewness, muchness, rareness,
Greatness of this endless only
Precious world in which he says
He lives - he then unties the string.

The problem the children face is how to comprehend the huge variety and scale of a material world which is also 'endless'. This establishes a tension between the 'finite' and the 'infinite' which is ironically treated in 'To Be Less Philosophical', a

further rejection of philosophical enquiry, in which the poet's attempt to reconcile the 'infinite variety' of God with His 'finite omnipresence', ends in absurdity and incomprehensibility. In 'Warning to Children' the process is less absurd but equally pointless. The opening of each layer of the parcel to reveal another parcel is a metaphor for a process of empirical enquiry which, in mathematical terms, fails to establish value and instead merely affirms identity. In other words, the enquirer attempts to 'solve' an equation, but his methodology is only capable of proving that $x = x$. The methodology Graves rejects is that of scientific enquiry, which had attracted him when he was influenced by Rivers and Mallik, and instead he accepts the need for intuition and irrational thought - or what he himself termed 'unreason' - if the parcel is to be untied. This is, I would suggest, the solution to Davie's 'riddle', that a reconciliation of the 'finite' with the 'infinite' is impossible to achieve by rational thought alone. In terms of the 'game', you can only know what is *inside* the 'neat brown paper parcel' by guessing, which is essentially what he proceeded to do by embracing 'faith' in *The White Goddess*.

'Faith' in the White Goddess as 'protest'

There is of course nothing new in this way of thinking, for the traditional defence against Cartesianism is still 'irrational thought', or what is more usually known as 'faith' - the leap in the dark, the acceptance of belief without proof. However, Graves's rejection of Christianity during the war seems to have been irrevocable, and in his search for 'meaning' his unreason now brought him to embrace a more personal religious belief which, as he saw it, successfully reconciled the 'finite' with the 'infinite', as well as explained the problematic relationship between himself and his historical context. For Graves the 'parcel' was 'opened' by faith in a matriarchal divinity rather than the patriarchal God of Christianity, and the apparent idiosyncracy of this faith was explained by a revisionist interpretation of history which also conveniently redefines the concept of a literary canon by identifying two distinct traditions in poetry: 'Muse' poetry, which is the 'true' tradition, and its later 'deviation' in Apollonian poetry. Thus for the 'dedicated poet...history [is] a dangerous deviation from the true course of human life - an attempt to deny women their age-old moral ascendancy':

> Orthodox Christianity marks a parting of ways between poets who serve the Muse, and non-poets who inherit from the patriarchal Hebrew prophets a mistrust of woman as the temptress: prime cause of man's fall from divine grace. By asserting an irrepressible confidence in woman, as being

> closer to the divine than man, the poet imaginatively casts himself for the rôle of the sacred king destined to die at his queen's command. And the early mediaeval Church, recognizing a widespread homesickness for the Goddess, shrewdly gave this emotion vent by the Sanction of Mariolatry: though extolling Mary as a virgin without blemish, and denying her membership in the Divine Trinity. Catholic poets have accepted this compromise; but the poet for whom the Muse, so far from being a virgin, presides over physical passion, will continue to pledge her his eternal faith, arbitrary and merciless though she may seem - an attitude which appears evil to Christians, and morbid to philosophers. His is *a wholehearted protest* against the patriarchal system: in so far as it values the intellect at the expense of instinct; and force at the expense of persuasion; and written laws at the expense of custom.[12]

The italics are mine. Despite all the later, rather eccentric, talk of black and white goddesses and 'personal muses'[13], it should be remembered that Graves's pursuit of the White Goddess was originally and perhaps primarily a personal protest against certain dominant political, social and cultural forces which, as he saw it, were responsible for making contemporary society 'godawful' in 'an anti-poetic sense'[14], 'loveless'[15], and 'intellectually and morally in perfect confusion'[16], as well as a protest against the mythology of Genesis as a 'distortion' of the 'truth' in 'infinite' terms[17]. This protest was the culmination of a process which had its origins in Graves's experiences at the Somme, and which led him to reject his family, education and social and cultural environment, denouncing them in *Goodbye to All That*, and to

abandon them to begin a new life in a society which was apparently (to his mind at least) not governed by the patriarchal system[18], and in which he willingly allowed himself to be ruled by a human but 'holy' female authority.

That Graves saw his departure from England in 1929 as an opportunity finally to shake off the education and conditioning he had grown to resent, and 'refashion' an identity independent of English social and cultural constraints, is evident in two poems of the time, 'The Cloak' and 'Country Mansion'. 'The Cloak' fictionalises the poet's sudden departure to France in the wake of scandal. Riding, with whom he was by then living with openly in London, attempted suicide in April 1929 after failing to bring the Irish poet Geoffrey Phibbs under her 'authority': Graves was investigated by the police for her 'attempted murder' while she herself faced the threat of a deportation order (she was an American citizen) for attempted suicide, which was then still in itself a crime. The scandalous nature of this behaviour was compounded by the frankness of *Goodbye To All That*, written while Riding was still in hospital recovering from a broken pelvis and four broken vertebrae. In 'The Cloak', an anonymous aristocrat is caught up in a mysterious scandal, the sensationalism of which is ironically referred to by the poet's use of the language of historical romance:

> Into exile with only a few shirts,

> Some gold coin and the necessary papers.
>
> ....so at last we find him
>
> In humble lodgings maybe at Dieppe,
>
> His shirts unpacked, his night-cap on a peg,
>
> Passing the day at cards and swordsmanship
>
> Or merry passages with chambermaids,
>
> By night at his old work...

The nature of this 'work' remains mysterious but one assumes, given the biographical context, that it refers to Graves's writing which has added fuel to the scandal which forces him into exile. This exile, however, is not the inconvenience it may appear to others: 'his Lordship's' self-sufficiency and independence make him 'at home anywhere'. He has therefore no need for forgiveness or reconciliation, and no wish to return:

> exile's but another name
>
> For an old habit of non-residence
>
> In all but the recesses of his cloak.

In 'The Country Mansion', exile is the inevitable reaction of a 'rebel' who refuses to accept his given role in life at the table of the living dead in the ancestral home. The poem returns to the nightmare, haunted imagery of the neurasthenic poems, but this time the poet is able to escape by physically leaving the house, determined never to return. He rejects his inheritance and chooses an independent life on the 'far roads' instead of the living death which conformity entails:

> This rebel does not hate the house,
> Nor its dusty joys impugn:
> No place less reverend could provoke
> So proud an absence from it.
>
> He has that new malaise of time:
> Gratitude choking with vexation
> That he should opulently inherit
> The goods and titles of the extinct.

By cutting himself off from everything signified by 'England' or 'all that', Graves was attempting to escape his 'conditioning in the Protestant morality of the English governing classes' which was incompatible with his own 'rebellious nature and... overriding poetic obsession'[19]. *The White Goddess* was a further attempt to establish an alternative view of the world which accommodated this 'rebellion' and 'obsession', based on a belief system which explained to his satisfaction the malaise of contemporary civilization, and which placed the poet at the centre of society.

The White Goddess mythology as strategy for establishing a poetic 'independence'

In *The White Goddess* Graves seeks to rediscover certain 'lost rudiments' of poetry which, he maintains, were once known to

ancient poets whose 'chief interest was the refinement of complex poetic truth to exact statement'[20]. In a Celtic golden age these poets were sacrosanct and at table sat next to the king, who came under their moral tutelage. The Irish *ollave* underwent a 'very difficult twelve year course', in which he learned the secret 'poetic lore... ultimately based on magic principles' from other master poets. At the end of this 'he knew the history and mythic value of every word he used'[21], and consequently enjoyed immense religious and political authority. The problem with contemporary society, as Graves saw it, is that poets no longer possess this social and cultural authority, just as they have forgotten the 'mythic knowledge' which imbued their work with 'truth'[22]. Instead they have lost their way and it is 'only by rare accidents of spiritual regression that [modern] poets make their lines mythically potent in the ancient sense'[23]. *The White Goddess* was a bold attempt to reconstruct the 'lost rudiments' known to these master-poets by the analysis of a handful of Welsh and Irish texts and thus reestablish the lost 'poetic lore' which would inform his own attempts - begun under the tutelage of Laura Riding - to refine 'complex poetic truth to exact statement'[24]. Of all the twentieth century's attempts to 'regenerate' English poetry - which had been Graves's declared aim since he had sought association with the Georgians[25] - this was perhaps the most radical as well as the most idiosyncratic and unlikely.

As a programme for reform it may have been 'unworldly', but it was by no means unpolitical, for in Graves's view cultural regeneration was inextricably linked to political and 'spiritual' reform. The analysis of contemporary poetic decadence in *The White Goddess* is bound up with an unequivocal condemnation of the 'present age'. As in 'Recalling War', he sees nothing to encourage the belief that man is capable of self-reform:

> ...There seems no escape from our difficulties until the industrial system breaks down for some reason or other, as it nearly did in Europe during the Second World War, and nature reasserts herself with grass and trees among the ruins.[26]

Graves was sceptical of the view that 'the way out of our present troubles is a return to religion', a claim, according to him, usually made by those in power who really intend not an emotional or spiritual reformation but 'an improvement in national and international ethics'[27]. The problem, as he saw it, was the tendency of all societies to institutionalise religion and translate spiritual experience into an ethical or legal system:

> It must be explained that the word *lex* 'law', began with the sense of a 'chosen word', or magical pronouncement, and that, like *lictor*, it was later given a false derivation from *ligare*. Law in Rome grew out of religion: occasional pronouncements developed proverbial force and became legal principles. But as soon as religion in its primitive sense is interpreted as social obligation and defined by tabulated laws -

> as soon as Apollo the Organizer, God of Science, usurps the power of his Mother the Goddess of inspired truth, wisdom and poetry, and tries to bind her devotees by laws - inspired magic goes, and what remains is theology, ecclesiastical ritual, and negatively ethical behaviour.[28]

Riding had earlier been more optimistic about the 'present trouble' in *The World and Ourselves* (1938). For her, the current international crisis was the result of 'moral failure' among so-called 'outside people', 'the institutionally minded directors of affairs'[29], as well as of inertia or 'failure among independent minded and sensitive "inside people" who should include most women and all poets - to give the outside people a lead'[30]. The principal remedy Riding recommended was 'continued insistence by the inside people on personal integrity'[31]. Graves was one of many contributors to this book, having been designated by Riding as one of the 'inside people' and one can see in his contribution the beginning of his thesis that the world's problems began with the replacement of a matriarchal system by a patriarchy, the strongest contemporary expression of which was the fascism spreading across Europe:

> The way of the world is, when you look closely at it, based on a sentimental glorification of paternity. History proper begins everywhere with the supersession of matriarchal culture by patriarchy, of poetic myth by prosaic records of generation - how this hero begat that hero and he another - with notes of the battles and laws which made each hero famous.[32]

The development of this idea led Graves to re-question the 'purpose' of poetry, and to associate what he saw as its decline with the contemporary 'confusion' of western civilization. The modern poet's rejection of his ultimate source of truth - in symbolic terms the goddess - was both symptomatic of and responsible for this confusion:

> 'What is the use or function of poetry nowadays?' is a question not the less poignant for being defiantly asked by so many stupid people or apologetically answered by so many silly people. The function of poetry is religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of mixed exaltation and horror that her presence excites. But 'nowadays'? Function and use remain the same: only the application has changed. This was once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born, by obedience to the wishes of the lady of the house; it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by capricious experiments in philosophy, science and industry, and brought ruin on himself and his family. 'Nowadays' is a civilization in which the prime emblems of poetry are dishonoured. In which serpent, lion and eagle belong to the circus-tent; ox, salmon and boar to the cannery; racehorse and greyhound to the betting ring; and the sacred grove to the saw-mill. In which the Moon is despised as a burned-out satellite of the Earth and woman reckoned as 'auxiliary State personnel'. In which money will buy almost anything but truth, and almost anyone but the truth-possessed poet.[33]

In his own poetic practice Graves set about remedying this situation, as his poetry depended on a new - or rather ancient - group of images derived from his readings of early texts whose authors still (he claimed) adhered to a matriarchal tradition. These images were on the surface simple and straightforward, consisting for the most part of names of trees and animals, but after 1946 meaning within a Graves poem came to depend in part on an awareness of their potential historic and 'mythic value'. Graves wrote a number of intriguing and striking poems on the 'single poetic theme' in the years immediately following publication of *The White Goddess*, but the meaning of these poems remains elusive and at times impenetrable even to a reader who has also read *The White Goddess*, for they depend on a linguistic meaning extrinsic to either the poet's or reader's cultural environment, to express complex and intense personal emotions. Although Graves systematized these images into a 'grammar', the poems cannot be explained by simple reference to *The White Goddess* as a sort of dictionary or *vade mecum*. Graves continued to draw on his subconscious for initial inspiration, when he would write in a pseudo 'poetic trance', and even he on occasion seemed puzzled by the result. Martin Seymour-Smith records how T. S. Eliot, who published *The White Goddess*, expressed particular admiration for 'Nuns and Fish', used by Graves in the book to 'demonstrate the peculiar workings of poetic thought'[34]:

> Circling the circlings of their fish,
> Nuns walk in white and pray;
> For he is chaste as they,
> Who was dark-faced and hot in Silvia's day,
> And in his pool drowns each unspoken wish.

'[Eliot] rose from his chair, exclaiming: "That's certainly real poetry, the real thing! But what does it mean, and how on earth did you do it?". Graves, pleased, shrugged his shoulders modestly and muttered, "Don't know, don't know. It's there. I saw it".'[35]

The White Goddess explicates the theory which is the starting point of any informed reading of what one might call the 'White Goddess poems', and especially those designated 'Magical Poems' in *Collected Poems 1914-1947*, which include 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice', 'The Song of Blodeuwedd', 'Instructions to the Orphic Adept', 'Lament for Pasiphaë' and 'Return of the Goddess'. The creation of this literary context as the essential reference point for his poems is a strategy for establishing poetic independence from contemporary cultural and social contexts, just as he was trying to avoid them in 'real life' by exiling himself to a remote agricultural community in one of the 'backward parts of Southern and Western Europe', the 'only' place left where 'a lively sense still survives of... continued worship' of the Goddess, who is 'no townswoman' and therefore has no emotional or religious appeal to modern urbanised society[36].

In proposing this literary and ideological context as an alternative to the dominant 'Apollonian' ideology of the present historical moment (of which the poetry is itself an act of rejection) Graves sought to establish a contextual autonomy for his texts, a self-sufficiency not dissimilar to that contained within the linguistic activities of Riding, who by writing her own dictionary essentially wished to redefine the meaning of words to accord with her own poetic practice. Graves had always been concerned with exercising control over his readers' possible responses, since he declared in 1922 that poetry was 'the more-or-less deliberate attempt, with the help of rhythmic mesmerism, to impose an illusion of actual experience on the minds of others'[37]. It was this pursuit of control which led Graves to become overly 'preoccupied with the physical side of poetry', with the ways and means of influencing, persuading and 'hypnotising'[38] the reader. It also explains the relative absence of ambiguity in his verse, for he is always at pains to make his point clearly and precisely, and he denied the suggestion that his poems might contain a hidden meaning of which he himself was unaware[39]. The establishment of his own 'grammar' of poetic myth as the ideological context of his poetry was a further attempt at control, for the reader's ability to construct his esoteric signs is made dependent on reference to Graves's own definition of their historical and cultural significance. What makes this attempt at control particularly ambitious is that the reader who allows himself to be steered in

the intended direction will find himself repeatedly confronted with an assertion of Graves's view of poetry, which is implicit in the poem being read and explicit in the prose 'grammar'. This assertion is itself the significance of the 'White Goddess poems', such as 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice', which is as much 'about' poetry, as it is 'about' the White Goddess, or love, or other human relationships such as that with his son Juan:

> There is one story and one story only
> That will prove worth your telling,
> Whether as learned bard or gifted child;
> To it all lines or lesser gauds belong
> That startle with their shining
> Such common stories as they stray into.

Muse poetry and Apollonian poetry

This poem constitutes a manifesto for what Graves referred to as 'Muse poetry'. This is 'the unaccountable product of a trance in which the emotions of love, fear, anger or grief are profoundly engaged, though at the same time powerfully disciplined: in which intuitive thought reigns supralogically, and personal rhythm subdues metre to its purpose'[40]. 'Apollonian poetry', on the other hand, is composed 'wittily, should the occasion serve, always reasonably, always on a preconceived plan, and derived from a close knowledge of rhetoric, prosody, classical example,

and contemporary fashion'[41]. The pleasure of Apollonian poetry is 'consciously aesthetic', while 'the effect on readers of Muse poetry, with its opposite poles of ecstasy and melancholia, is what the French call a *frisson*, and the Scots call a "grue"' - the same effect as made the hairs of Housman's chin bristle if he repeated the poem silently when shaving.[42]

Although Graves has not acknowledged any debt to Nietzsche, and has only written disparagingly of him as a stereotype of German characteristics[43], his distinction between Apollonian and Muse poetry suggests a connection with Nietzsche's identification of the two 'spirits' or 'impulses' of art, the 'Apolline' and the 'Dionysiac', in *The Birth of Tragedy*, though this connection has gone generally unremarked. For Nietzsche, 'Dionysiac' art is characterized by its origins in 'intoxication'[44], 'magic'[45], in the 'blissful ecstasy which... rises from man's innermost core'[46], and in 'symbolic intuition'[47]. Poetry inspired by the White Goddess, in the same way, depends on a knowledge of 'poetic magic'[48], whose 'effect' is 'ecstasy', while the 'inspiration' of the muse poet is described by Graves 'symbolically' as 'the breathing-in by the poet of intoxicating fumes from an intoxicating cauldron'[49]. The sense of 'intoxication' in muse poetry was increased by Graves after he became interested in the properties of hallucinogenic mushrooms, their use in ancient religious ceremonies and as a source of artistic inspiration, and it is worth noting his identification of Dionysus as 'the mushroom god'[50].

'Apolline' art is not the negative concept for Nietzsche that it is for Graves. For Nietzsche its 'impulse' is 'dream'[51] rather than 'intoxication'. Like 'Dionysiac' art it demonstrates man's 'ardent longing for illusion and for redemption by illusion'[52], but is associated with 'illusion of the beauty of mere appearances', or the 'reduction of illusion to mere illusion'[53]. Apollo, being an 'ethical deity' demands 'moderation... and self-knowledge', but on the other hand 'could not live without Dionysus'[54], for the basis of Nietzsche's theory is that art is created by a violent 'coupling' 'of these two very different tendencies' in man's nature, which although in 'opposition' to each other, are interdependent[55]. For Graves, however, the Apollonian impulse is not dependent on the Dionysiac but is a rejection of, and 'deviation' from, the 'truth' represented by the goddess. It is a conscious alternative chosen by poets who are 'sober men / Ruled by the God Apollo's golden mean'[56], who are ruled by 'moderation' and 'reason' and who prefer the material rewards bestowed by an academy or cultural establishment less demanding than the implacable goddess[57].

Graves's concept of Muse poetry was by no means a sudden revelation, but was a rationalisation of his poetic practice of over twenty years. The description of Muse poetry as originating in a pseudo-trance in which conflicting emotions are reconciled is essentially unchanged from the psychological theory of inspiration

constructed in *On English Poetry* out of Graves's attempts to use poetry as a therapy for the mental and emotional disturbance caused by the experience of war:

> When conflicting issues disturb [the poet's] mind, which in its conscious state is unable to reconcile them logically, the poet acquires the habit of self-hypnotism, as practised by the witch doctors, his ancestors in poetry.
>
> He learns in self-protection to take pen and paper and let the pen solve the hitherto insoluble problem which has caused the disturbance.[58]

The most significant development in Graves's theory of poetry from 1920 to 1946 was its gradual incorporation of a vision of the muse poet as an outsider, or 'the fox who has lost its brush', who seeks to avoid modern 'urban civilization'[59]. The Apollonian poet, who is Graves's 'rival', is the archetypal 'insider', the social and political conformist who achieves success through his ability to 'masquerade'[60] and entertain the established social hierarchy with fashionable and amusing verse. If everyone 'were content to undergo a normal education, work hard in a regular job, order his life reasonably, marry a sensible woman, pay his taxes when required, be socially co-operative and count himself happy in such well-doing', then there would be no need for 'Muse poetry'[61]. The Apollonian, with his 'loyal odes to the Sovereign, celebrations of rural pleasure, epic accounts of heroic feats, elegies for the dead, and stately epithalamia'[62], embodies social

and political stability, but does not provide an outlet for the emotional or spiritual conflicts of individuals. His art is satisfying only if 'you have never felt a grue or *frisson* in your life, never fallen desperately in love, never faced personal disaster, never questioned the religious tenets of your childhood...'[63]. Graves, of course, had done all of these, and cut himself off from the literary and social establishment in the process. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that estrangement from established social authority is entirely consistent with the pursuit of 'poetic truth', for the Goddess is for Graves 'the primitive female who has separated herself from whatever laws have hitherto governed society, and whom man consistently fails to discipline'[64]. Pursuit of this primitive female makes of Muse poetry a 'distillation of love in its most unsocial, unphilosophical, unlegalistic, unliterary sense'[65].

'Defiance'

Graves's rationalisation of his views on poetry in *The White Goddess* shows how these views were inextricably linked to his sense of social and political alienation in post-First World War society. This was the 'new anarchical era' in which it seemed 'anything can happen', that he described to an Oxford audience in 1961:

> Let me speak as a poet, rather than professor - in mythical language. An ancient Greek prophecy is being fulfilled before our eyes. Apollo, the god of Science, having formed a palace conspiracy with his half-brother Hermes, god of Politics, and his uncle Plutos, god of Money, has emasculated Almighty Zeus with the same curved sickle, laid up at Sicilian Drepana, that Zeus used on his father Cronus. Zeus still remains propped on his throne, but a Regency Council of Three has taken over his powers. In this new anarchical era anything may happen. That the Divine Triumvirate are suspicious of one another, and that their rival ambitions have made them careless of mankind, is proved by the absurd cold war now being waged between East and West, with the massive resources of Science, Money, and Politics. They have cut civilization loose from its moorings: familiar coasts of orthodox religion, philosophy, and economics fade in the dusky distance.[66]

In 1965 Graves reflected ruefully that he could not deny his place 'in the late Christian epoch of two World Wars and their horror-comic aftermath'[67], and although this 'epoch' is not consciously discussed in the texts in terms of 'topical reference', it is present as a defining force in the process of self-definition. The experience of the First World War produced in him a jaundiced, alienated view of society, which is usually viewed in the poems as hostile to the poet's self. In this environment, the poet's task becomes to survive society's influence, rather than influence its survival, which became the mission of many other poets writing in the 1930s who, unlike Graves, had not experienced the extreme

disillusionment of fighting in the First World War. For Graves it was already too late to 'save Civilization', as 'Dick' says in *But It Still Goes On*:

> It's too late for amending the world now; the bottom has fallen out of it. The Sunday journalists and the politicians and the Church of course all pretend that it hasn't, and everyone else plays up to them. But it's no good. It's finished; except that it still goes on.[68]

The 'true', or 'dedicated', or 'muse', or 'romantic' poet caught up in such a world was reduced to a voice in the wilderness, continuing to seek and express 'private truth' despite being surrounded by a dead civilization. Graves acknowledged that it was tempting for a poet to 'become a "do-gooder" by organizing political interference with the "mechanarchy"', but his true responsibility lay in being himself 'and not a conditioned human being'[69]. The correct response for a poet of integrity, for whom poetry was more than a merely literary activity, was 'defiance':

> For a poet this defiance is, of course metaphorical: death means giving in to dead forces, dead routines of action and thought. The Muse represents eternal life and the sudden lightning-flash of wisdom [ie poetry]. The walking dead surround the poetic obsessionist, trying to interest him in universal topicality, and at the same time trying to drain his life-force. "The world must go on", they tell him. "Why not join us? Support the machine that we have created, and give it an appearance of human meaning. Join our guild of united

> morticians. We will pay you well and shower honours on you - you may even be elected an honorary vice-president."
> "You smell like the dead," he answers. "Give me the faintest proof that you still have any spark of life left in you, and I will listen."
> No answer.[70]

The problem of remaining 'defiant' in a world again torn apart by war is the subject of two poems written to Graves's daughters Jenny and Lucia in the early 1940s. 'At the Savoy Chapel' begins as a satire on the uncomfortable formality of the society wedding between, as the poem's head-note quotation from *World's Press News* puts it: 'Flight Officer Jenny Nicholson, daughter of Robert Graves...[and] Alexander Clifford, the war correspondent'. The newspaper also noted that the couple 'met in the Front line' and it is to this fact that Graves turns at the end of the poem. His delight in the wedding of his daughter darkens as 'the trophy sword that shears the cake' 'recalls':

> What God you entertained last year together,
> His bull neck looped with guts,
> Trampling corpse-carpet through the villages -

The sudden intrusion of this imagery into a poem which until then had adopted a witty, urbane manner, comes as a shock to the reader, in the same way as such memories of barbarism are shocking and out of place in the 'civilized' atmosphere of the Savoy Chapel. It recalls the contrast made in 'A Boy in Church',

written in 1917, between the peaceful calm of a community at prayer and the turmoil of war outside the little church, and inside the boy's head as he sits in the congregation. The people at his daughter's wedding, however, are not ignorant of the realities of war and are not condemned for complacency, as in the 1917 poem. On the contrary, Graves's fear is that his daughter and son-in-law will be damaged by their direct experience of war in the way that he himself was almost destroyed by it. His 'blessing' on them therefore calls for a 'defiant' resistance of their individual selves to the influence of experience:

> Here is my private blessing: so to remain
> As today you are, with features
> Resolute and unchangeably your own.

Graves's hope for his daughter is the same hope for poetry as 'the good existence' held out by Riding, in which the individual self is not 'influenced' by 'life', or 'hammered upon' by experience, but seeks to achieve through poetry 'peace and reconciliation' between the 'inner nature of a man and the external world without him'[71].

In 'To Lucia at Birth', Graves's new-born baby daughter is warned by the poet-father not to heed the 'welcome' of a world in the middle of a global war, or be drawn into its insane and destructive activity:

Though the moon beaming matronly and bland
Greets you, among the crowd of the new-born
With 'welcome to the world' yet understand
That still her pale, lascivious unicorn
And bloody lion are loose on either hand:
With din of bones and tantararà of horn
Their fanciful cortège parades the land -
Pest on the high road, wild-fire in the corn.

This, the poet admits, is 'outrageous company to be born into'. The only response to such a world, he warns Lucia, is to resist the temptation to 'regress' by joining the crowd and intervening in its activities. She must, again in the language of Riding's 'A Prophecy or a Plea', learn to exchange 'outsight for insight' and not let 'experience' or the 'multitude' alter the essentially individual nature of her conscious self:

reckon time by what you are or do,
Not by the epochs of the war they spread.
Hark how they roar, but never turn your head.
Nothing will change them, let them not change you.

The Spanish Civil War

The isolationism inherent in this attitude has its most extreme expression in 'The Fallen Tower of Siloam', written in response to the Spanish Civil War. Despite having lived in Spain for seven

years prior to the war, Graves was notably reticent in writing about it. At the same time as so many British poets were writing about Spain and making plans to go there and join 'the struggle', Robert Graves, the veteran war poet and honorary Spaniard, was silent on the subject and left the country as a refugee on a Royal Navy destroyer. It was an action which has led to some misunderstanding about Graves's attitude to Franco and fascism generally. Valentine Cunningham in particular interprets Graves's absence from the *Left Review* pamphlet of 1937, *Authors Take Sides on The Spanish Civil War*[72], as evidence of his pro-Franco sympathies. 'Silence was potentially a very significant response', writes Cunningham, but he radically misinterprets Graves's 'silence':

> Graves and Laura Riding and Hilaire Belloc and Roy Campbell and Yeats would in all probability have been as unequivocally pro-Franco as the small handful the *Left Review* pamphlet allowed to speak on his behalf... [73]

The speculation inherent in Cunningham's interpretation of Graves's attitude was unnecessary, for by the time Cunningham was writing in 1988 ample evidence had been published, both by Graves himself and others[74], to demonstrate that Graves's sympathies were contrary to Cunningham's supposition. Cunningham ignores Graves's discussion of Spain in *The Long Week-End*, published in 1940, in which Graves notes that the 'struggle' in Spain 'moved not only the left but all intelligent

people in Britain most strongly'[75]. Not since the French Revolution, Graves claimed, had there been 'a foreign question that so divided intelligent British opinion'[76]. It was a struggle which could be seen in many ways, depending on one's personal point of view: 'as Fascism versus Communism, or Totalitarianism versus Democracy, or Italy and Germany versus England and France, or Force versus Liberty, or Rebels versus Constitutional Government, or Barbarism versus Culture, or Catholicism versus Aetheism, or Order versus Anarchy...'.[77] Although Graves was attempting to write an impartial 'history' of the period, he makes his own position on the Spanish Civil War clear by implication:

> though opinion was divided, the majority felt at least sympathy for the Republic... . Most people, in fact, who either held progressive views, or simply believed in 'decency', supported the Republican side, and many enthusiastic young men fought for it and were killed.[78]

The Long Week-End also contains an account of how, after arriving in England after leaving Spain, Graves had gone to see Winston Churchill, whom he had earlier known through Lawrence, to 'stress the great danger of the situation in the Western Mediterranean'[79] and urge him to support intervention. Subsequent biographical accounts have put this interview in context. Graves was considerably embroiled in the local political situation in Deià, was a close friend of the Communist mayor there and had been denounced as a spy by local fascists and

interviewed about his behaviour by the authorities. His sympathies were in fact never in doubt, as is evident by the letter written to his brother John in March 1936 about the recent Spanish elections in which there had been a left-wing landslide:

> If the new Spanish government lasts it will be a great benefit to Spain, and not least to the Balearics. Personally, owing to a funny business connected with police-spies and our local enemy the doctor, we were greatly relieved that the Lefts got in.[80]

In *The Long Week-End* Graves comments that by 1936 'people who prided themselves on their intelligence shrank more and more from contact with party affairs', which 'had fallen into the hands of phrase-mongers and dead-heads'[81]. The Spanish War, however, gave 'politics' a wider meaning: 'namely, thought for the defence of what was still sound in civilization'[82]. The urgency of the Spanish situation and its effect on the British intelligentsia, meant that 'political convictions were forced on well-known writers'[83] - an indirect reference, one assumes, to the *Left Review*'s questionnaire to writers which Graves had declined to answer, along with a number of others, including, it would appear, James Joyce, George Orwell, and Graham Greene[84]. The questionnaire, sent to British writers and poets, insisted that they 'take sides' and denied them the option of a seat on the fence: 'For it is impossible any longer to take no side'[85].

As Graves saw it, writers who in this climate 'continued at their ordinary tasks of writing... were derided as "escapists living in ivory towers"', for it was now thought 'incumbent on poets to "get in touch with reality"'[86]. He himself resisted pressure and continued in his poetry to avoid 'topical reference' or be 'a mere servant and interpreter of civilization'[87]. 'The Fallen Tower of Siloam' thus does not treat the situation in Spain directly, but metaphorically. It is, on the surface, a dramatisation of the Biblical story in Luke XIII, v. 1-5, as told by an eye-witness survivor of the collapsed tower, who had realised that the tower was about to fall, having seen the 'wide fissures' open up on the 'west wall'. The crumbling tower is an emblem for European civilization in what seemed the final stages of decline, with the 'west wall' as Spain, whose weakness and split brought the whole unsteady edifice down. The 'poet' or narrator greeted the collapse with some sense of relief, as it released him from the intolerable burden of waiting. His tone, however, is cynical and pitiless, as the 'shrieks' of the old men caught in the tower dwindle to 'comic yelps':

> We were there already - already the collapse
> Powdered the air with chalk, and shrieking
> Of old men crushed under the fallen beams
> Dwindled to comic yelps. How not terrible
> When the event outran the alarm
> And suddenly we were free -
>
> Free to forget how grim it stood,

> That tower, and what wide fissures ran
> Up the west wall, how rotten the under-pinning
> At the south-eastern angle...

The 'south-eastern angle' is a reference to Italy and the rise of fascism there. The poem is anti-fascist by implication, but it also seems, on the surface at least, anti-'civilization'. Poets in Siloam are superior moral beings who are above the 'crowd' or 'multitudes'. They have no responsibility to use their 'insight', their knowledge of the 'truth', to save the crowd from their self-destructive foolishness:

> It behoved us, indeed, as poets
> To be silent in Siloam, to foretell
> No visible calamity.

This is the concept of the poet as separate from the 'crowd' and the concerns of 'civilization' as set out by Riding and Graves in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (see below) but the poem is more ambiguous than this implies. Graves had made use of the story of Siloam on another, earlier occasion, when as a retired army captain and parish councillor he had made a public speech on the steps of the Islip village church at a war memorial service in 1922:

> [The rector] suggested I should read poems about the war. Instead of Rupert Brooke on the glorious dead, I read some of the more painful poems of Sassoon and Wilfred Owen about men dying of gas-poisoning and about buttocks bulging from

> the mud. And I suggested that the men who had fallen, destroyed as it were by the Tower of Siloam, had not been particularly virtuous or particularly wicked, but just average soldiers, and that the survivors should thank God that they were alive and do their best to avoid wars in future.[88]

This passage from *Goodbye To All That* provides a useful insight into Graves's use of the tower as an image in the poem. 'The Fallen Tower of Siloam' contains the same acceptance of suffering and death, the same lack of sentimental exaltation of the glorious dead, the same determination of the survivor, as the speech, but it does not include any moral exhortation to avoid future war or reform in any way. The narrator-poet, on the contrary, is morally detached from the society he lives in, and in the words of Riding's exhortation to writers to be 'independent', he 'adheres imperturbably to [his] difference from the mass numbers... the morally dilettantish multitudes'[89]. The narrator-poet might have saved lives by speaking out his warning, and the reader might therefore choose to condemn his 'silence', just as he or she might condemn the cynical inhumanity implicit in the descriptions of suffering. Such a reading would, however, be in defiance of the text, for it would be wrong to assume that Graves is using his narrator ironically, as a tool to expose arrogance, given his support of Riding's views on the necessity of the poet's detachment from the 'crowd'[90], and his somewhat despairing opinion, expressed in *The White Goddess*, that 'escape' from the 'present difficulties' of 'civilization' first requires a total collapse,

which would allow 'nature' to 'reassert [itself] with grass and trees among the ruins'[91]. That the poem is, nevertheless, ambiguous, is suggested by a consideration of both the Biblical account from which Graves derives his metaphor for political crisis in Europe, and the Islip speech. In the Bible, Jesus asks his audience if they think that those who died when the tower fell were necessarily, because of their fate, greater sinners than those (like the 'poet') who survived. He then warns them against any such assumption: 'I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish'. Jesus's interpretation of the story is noticeable in the poem only by its absence, but it does accord with the tenor and the moral of Graves war memorial speech in 1922, when he reminded his 'scandalized' audience that the 'glorious dead' were 'not particularly virtuous or particularly wicked', and even called for some sort of moral reform by telling the survivors to 'thank God' and seek to 'avoid' future wars. Jesus uses the incident at Siloam to criticise the 'righteous' for their complacency, and the narrator-poet's self-righteous and detached superiority is surely an extreme form of such complacency. Awareness of the Biblical context thus invites the reader to predict that the 'poet' will also, as Jesus had warned, 'likewise perish' if he does not 'repent'.

The individual and 'the crowd'

In *The White Goddess*, as well as in the subsequent essays and lectures which clarified his new ideological position[92], Graves expressed political dissatisfactions with British society in a cryptic mythological language, but making it clear none the less that for him the political problem was at heart a spiritual and moral issue. In the same way, his own 'struggle to become a poet in more than the literary sense' - that is, in a spiritual and moral sense - is at heart a political struggle to resist the negative morality of a society 'which has accepted a mechanarchy' and is 'governed by the forces of Science, Money and Politics' (in mythological terms, Apollo, Hermes and Pluto)[93]. Poetry is the weapon of resistance to these forces - 'true poetry' that is, which seeks 'truth' rather than the material, Apollonian rewards of fame and money.

'Protest', 'struggle' and 'resistance' are not words usually associated with Graves, whose poetry can, on the surface, seem 'apolitical'. Graves's poetry is non-dialectic in that it does not engage in polemic discourse on identifiable political issues. In 1926 'Riding and Graves' wrote *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, a 'word by word collaboration' which superseded the book provisionally titled *Untraditional Elements in English Poetry*, which Graves had already begun to write in collaboration with T. S. Eliot[94]. In a chapter on 'Modernist Poetry and

Civilization', they argued that a poet should be 'something more than a mere servant and interpreter of civilization'[95], and drew a distinction between 'modern-ness', which describes 'a keeping-up in poetry with the pace of civilization and intellectual history'[96], and 'modernism', which 'should describe a quality in poetry which has nothing to do with the date or with responding to civilization'[97]. Poets like Yeats who try 'to cope with civilization', and who, 'from an imagined necessity of action', reject or keep up with 'the social requirements that seem to be laid on poetry', are misguided and 'second class'[98]. The first class poet writes as 'a new and original individual' rather than, presumably, a 'quid', who merely reacts to the 'contemporaneous universe', while the first class poem has a 'quality of independence from both the reader and the poet...once the poet has separated if from his personality by making it complete - a new and self-explanatory creature'[99]. The 'creation' of poetry thus originates in the individual, in his thought and his reaction to experience, rather than in any 'discovery' about the social world he inhabits.

The assertion of the poetic self as 'a new and original individual' within a 'mass culture', in which individualism began to seem engulfed by the rise of 'the masses', is the subject of 'The Legs'. Like 'The Quids', this describes human existence as mechanistic, purposeless and mindless, by presenting a mass of disembodied legs hurrying by on a road going 'resolutely nowhere / In both

directions'. This was written in the early thirties, after Graves had left England and said 'goodbye' to, among other things, 'gross' 'overcrowding'[100]. A common theme in both the novels and poems of the time was a dislike of the the 'crowd', or what Ortega y Gasset, in *The Revolt of the Masses* (published in 1930) called 'mass-man', the 'multitude made visible' which had come to dominate both political and non-political life[101]. Cunningham, in *British Writers of the Thirties*, dedicates a whole chapter to literary descriptions of the masses, explaining:

> The '30s required of the bourgeois author some sort of response to the masses. At no previous era, not even in the Victorian 'age of great cities', had people been so conscious that modern industrialized, urbanized life was mass-life. Man had become Mass-man, *Massenmensch*, 'The Man' (to use Edgar Allan Poe's title) 'Of the Crowd'. Inescapably, the post-First-War sensibility had to grasp that it was in an age of mass-production, mass-demonstrations, mass-meetings, mass sporting occasions, mass communications, mass armies, a time when things would be done in, and to, and for crowds.[102]

Although Cunningham does not mention Graves specifically in this context, 'mass-life' was very much part of what his 'post-First-War sensibility' was trying to reject and 'avoid' by retreating to Deià, an isolated village of some three hundred people. In 'Postscript to *Goodbye To All That*', an essay written shortly after settling there, 'overcrowding' is referred to as a 'catastrophe' even greater than the war - which was merely a

symptom of this, war being 'one of the characteristic pursuits of the crowd'[103]. 'Overcrowding' is treated at length in a play written at the same time, *But It Still Goes On*. 'Dick', the hero of the play who is a thinly disguised version of its author, describes the 'catastrophe' as 'the moment when the last straw broke the back of reality, when the one unnecessary person too many was born'[104]. It was at that point when the 'population became unmanageable' and 'the proper people were finally swamped':

> Once they counted; now they no longer count. So it's impossible for a proper person to feel the world as a necessary world - an intelligible world in which there's any hope or fear for the future - a world worth bothering about - or, if he happens to be a poet, a world worth writing for... .[105]

'Dick's' response to the 'catastrophe' that is contemporary society is to personalise it, so that in a world in which there is no 'morality left to bother about' the only course of action possible for a poet is to concentrate on one's own 'personal morality' which 'gets more and more strict'[106]. This became a central tenet of Graves's attitude to life in the thirties, evident in poems such as 'To Lucia at Birth', 'The Fallen Tower of Siloam' and 'The Legs'. It was a view enlarged on by Riding in *The World and Ourselves*, who declared that writers should 'adhere imperturbably to [their] difference from the mass numbers' and should establish a self-protective 'Civilized Private Ethic' in stark

contrast to the 'morally dilletantish multitudes'[107]. Like Graves in *But It Still Goes On*, she appears to conflate 'the sinister outer happenings of our time' with 'the problem of the multitudes'[108]. Assured of her own position as a 'responsible mind' who possesses 'inner control' and is therefore one of the 'inner minority', she adopts a stance towards the 'outside people' which is both arrogant and sinister in implication:

> ...history only shows that 'truth' has been scattered prodigally to the multitudes. Their imagination of truth has been over-stimulated and their faculties of moral appreciation have been dulled by the strain put upon them. For the multitudes cannot experience truth, cannot 'know' - can only appreciate the moral aspects of truth. That is, the inner minority must be discreet in its utterances of truth: it must not expect recognition of truth from the multitudes, only moral appreciation. Much that we come to know we must keep to ourselves. But our inner certainties have an external application - and the ways in which they apply externally we must communicate to the multitudes. If we do not, we are keeping something back to which they are entitled: moral comfort.[109]

A sense of superiority such as this borders on being unbalanced: from such a giddy eminence there is but a short step to the concentration camp or the political structures of *1984*. Although Graves contributed to *The World and Ourselves* and shared Riding's fundamental emphasis on personal morality as the starting point for social regeneration, he held back from

embracing her more radical opinions. His own attitude to the 'crowd' was a combination of relatively straightforward officer-class snobbery about the rise of the proletariat and what Ortega y Gasset referred to as its increased 'visibility', and a more complex psychological reaction to the notion of group membership, in which he asserted his individual identity by assuring himself of his own essential 'differentness' to the collective mass. The crowds he describes in early poems and in *Goodbye To All That* are groups of civilians during the war: 'huge hysterical crowds' who waved flags and cheered at Waterloo Station as he and the other wounded were lifted off the hospital train on stretchers[110]; and the 'scum' who celebrated Armistice Day with such little regard for the past or the future. Such crowds were part of the 'all that' Graves wished to cut himself off from by physical exile from urbanised society, and were listed at the end of his autobiography as one of the things he claimed to have effectively eliminated from his life, along with 'politics, religion, conversations, literature, arguments...'[111].

In 'Postscript to *Goodbye to All That*', Graves writes as someone claiming to stand apart from the crowd, professing to an objective understanding of its behavioural characteristics. He does not, he maintains, 'interfere' in the pursuits of the crowd, by trying to prevent war for example, and so refrains from all active political engagement apart from 'deprecating' the crowd on those occasions when it threatens to interfere with his own private

pursuits[112]. His attitude to 'the crowd' expressed here and in *But It Still Goes On* would appear to have been influenced by his study of Freud in the early twenties, and particularly of *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, published in 1921. In this, Freud characterises the 'crowd' as 'impulsive', 'changeable', 'credulous', 'led almost exclusively by the unconscious' and with 'no critical faculty'[113]. 'Groups', Freud notes, 'have never thirsted after truth'[114]. Groups lack moral 'responsibility' and the effect on the individual entering into a group is to lose his sense of 'conscience'[115] as his individuality is 'obliterated'[116]. 'Dread of society (*soziale Angst*)' can therefore be seen as 'the essence of conscience'[117]. The individual who accepts 'obliteration' in the group is, on the other hand, 'no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will'[118]. Freud's remarks provide an extremely useful gloss on 'The Legs', which dramatizes the *soziale Angst* he describes, the resistance of the individual to obliteration in an 'impulsive', 'unconscious' and irresponsible 'crowd'.

The poet's attempted detachment from the 'crowd' in 'The Legs' includes an awareness of man's inclination towards 'regression' in mass group membership, on which Freud's theory is based, and expresses a frank fear of losing 'conscious' individuality by allowing the self to 'dissolve' and adopt the crowd's 'unconscious' moral standards[119]. The poet has, at the beginning of the poem, managed to stop walking 'resolutely nowhere' and

appears to have removed himself from the 'road', which represents membership of the crowd:

> My legs at least
> Were not in that rout,
> On grass by the road-side
> Entire I stood,
>
> Watching the unstoppable
> Legs go by
> With never a stumble
> Between step and step.

At this point, the poet congratulates himself on his difference to the anonymous, quid-like 'legs'. Standing still he relishes his moral superiority and laughs contemptuously at the blind ignorance of the busy crowd. However, he may have left the road - in biographical terms, abandoned overcrowded, urbanised England for empty, rural Deià - but as a human being he still has the same instincts as the crowd and could easily redissolve his individuality by regression. His contemptuous laughter is itself perhaps an act of such regression, for it is at this moment he suddenly finds himself back on the road:

> My head dizzied then:
> I wondered suddenly,
> Might I too be a walker
> From the knees down?
>
> Gently I touched my shins.

> The doubt unchained them:
> They had run in twenty puddles
> Before I regained them.

Insufficient self-knowledge, or 'consciousness', endangers the survival of individual integrity, and the poet must therefore be self-watchful and maintain faith in his own independence. To do otherwise is to 'unchain' a succession of automatic responses which 'degrade' the independence of the morally superior self.[120]

'The Legs' constitutes Graves's most succinct expression of his need as a poet to preserve what he called 'poetic integrity'. This demanded an independence from 'non-poetic' society, as he explained in one of the Clark lectures at Cambridge in 1955:

> Poetic integrity. Of what does it consist? ... By non-poetic activities I mean those that prejudice the poet's independence of judgement; such as a religious life which imposes ecclesiastical control on his private thoughts; or politics, which bind him to a party line; or science, if it is old-fashioned enough to deny the importance of magic; or philosophy, if he is expected to generalize about what he knows to be personally unique; or schoolmastering, if he must teach what he considers neither true nor necessary. Ideally poets should avoid enrolling themselves in any club, society or guild; for fear they may find themselves committed to group action of which they cannot individually approve.[121]

The main problem facing the poet, according to Graves in this lecture, was 'how to separate oneself from the non-poetic

world'[122], given that 'no poet can altogether avoid the responsibilities of citizenship'[123].

Riding's influence on 'The Legs'

This resistance to the 'automatic' impulses of the crowd, represented in a disembodied, dehumanized form, again recalls 'The Quids', which, Riding maintained, was above all 'an expression of personal dissociation from, rebuff of, the automatic existence-processes'[124]. Riding was, however, more than just an influence on 'The Legs', for the manuscript contains significant corrections in her handwriting[125]. Ten holograph drafts of the poem, or parts of the poem, are extant, together with three typescripts, only one of which is corrected. Facsimiles of the worksheets are included at the end of this chapter, in a proposed order of composition. Establishing such an order among the drafts of 'The Legs' has proved more problematic than with the other manuscript drafts at Buffalo which I have examined. The order of verses shifts dramatically in the early drafts, there are two what appear to be part-drafts, while a number of lines and phrases were omitted, to be reinstated in a later draft. It would also seem that Graves originally conceived of the poem as more of a love poem than finally resulted. These, the opening lines of what I propose is the second of the drafts extant (there may of

course be gaps in the collection, which would account for the difficulty of ordering) established a distinction between the 'legs' as one group and the poet and his lover as another, with their love enabling them to keep off the road which 'encircled' them:

> What you said to me,
> What I said to you,
> Though we did not whisper
> The legs could not hear.
>
> The road ~~encircled went by merrily~~ went by us,

There are three heavily-scored drafts with more corrections and crossings-out than the rest, with many lines absent from the final published version, and these are, I believe, the first drafts. On this assumption, Riding's annotations appear on the fourth draft - titled 'The Walkers' - when the poem has begun to resemble its final form, and on the tenth draft, which was the last before being sent to the typist. Graves's script is in black india ink, whereas Riding's suggestions are in pencil, which allows one to ascertain which of them is responsible not just for the writing but for the crossings-out. In the first verse of the fourth draft, Graves originally wrote out again the version he had established in the third draft:

> There was this road,
> And it led upward,
> And it led downward,

And it went nowhere.

'Nowhere' is crossed out in pencil, with 'up and down' written in Riding's hand beside it. This in turn is scored through in pencil and 'where I went' written (by Riding) above it. This is scored through in ink and below it, in Graves's hand, is written 'round and round', which is the version taken forward into the sixth draft. Riding had thus suggested alternatives which were rejected by Graves, but which led him to a rephrasing of the line as well as a subtle shift in meaning, from identifying a destination, even if 'nowhere', towards a notion of cyclic repetitiveness.

In the first line of the second stanza, all the crossings-out are in pencil, with a number of alterations in Riding's hand, here distinguished by italics:

~~Legs walked the road~~, *~~And the walkers~~ And the walkers were legs*

This was a change accepted by Graves, but again altered in the sixth draft, into what became the final version:

And the ~~walkers were~~ traffic was legs

The other significant annotations by Riding appear on the tenth draft, which is a clean copy written out for the typist (Riding includes a note to the typist to put a space between verses five and six). In verses five to nine all the scorings are in pencil and the

alternatives are in Riding's hand: this is clearly envisaged by Graves as the final draft, which he has passed to Riding for her approval and revision:

Legs for the road,
The road for legs,
~~Boldly~~ *Resolutely* nowhere
In ~~two~~ *both* directions.

My legs at least
Were not in that rout,
On grass by the road-side
Entire I stood

Watching the ~~processional~~ *unstoppable*
Legs go by,
~~How they limped, hopped, danced,~~ *With never a ~~fault~~ stumble*
~~Trod fast or slow~~ *Between step and step.*

Though my smile was broad
The legs could not see,
Though my laugh was loud
The legs could not hear.

~~Yet, laughing loudly,~~ *My head dizzied then,*
I wondered suddenly too
~~How other were my own legs~~ *Might I ~~not~~ be a walker*
From the knees down.

In the Introduction to *Collected Poems 1938* Graves thanked Riding 'for her constructive and detailed criticism of my poems in various stages of composition'[126]. Seymour-Smith elaborates on

this, claiming that from 1929 to 1936 Graves '"submitted" every one of his poems to her for approval', in the manner of 'a man putting himself into a state of purification so that he would be ready to be "judged"'[127]. The manuscript of 'The Legs' shows this 'constructive' 'criticism' in action and, I would argue, demonstrates how, on this occasion at least, her suggestions helped Graves achieve a more exact and coherent expression. 'Boldly', for example, attributes the 'legs' with a specific personality trait, and would if retained have been the only such characterisation in the poem. 'Resolutely', on the other hand, describes a 'determination or firmness of *purpose*' (*OED*) rather than a state of being, keeping the readers' attention on the action rather than introducing a perhaps confusing note of sympathy for possessors of 'boldness', which suggests 'human' virtues of 'courage' and 'vigour' (*OED*) in the face of a 'senseless, frightening / Fate'. That 'resolutely nowhere' is also oxymoronic dramatically reinforces the sense of an activity which is pointless and futile, adding to the overall cohesion of the poem. The substitution of 'both' for 'two' in the next line is similarly a more exact and in the circumstances appropriate choice of word: 'two' implies that there are possible alternatives for the 'legs' rather than the inevitability of coming and going along the one road. Graves's 'processional' would have introduced a note of order and even ceremony, inconsistent with the mockery of meaninglessness and with the description of light-hearted, muddled progression in 'limped, hopped, danced', which is also

struck through by Riding. Her alterations and additions to this, the seventh verse of the poem ('unstoppable'... 'with never a stumble / Between step and step') combine further to dehumanise the 'legs', evoking a picture of their 'existence-processes' as robotic and automatic, rather than in any way controlled or willed. In the ninth verse she struck through Graves's weak opening line ('Yet, laughing loudly') which did little more than repeat the penultimate line of the previous verse. Riding's substitution brings the poem into the immediate present, dramatically cutting off the complacent laughter of the preceding lines and introducing the unsettling possibility that the poet too might 'dizzy' and lose control, while 'might I be a walker' expresses the poet's sudden self-doubt with a concision and clarity superior to Graves's original line, which was awkward in construction and introduced a new concept of the legs as 'other', emphasising the distance between himself and the 'legs' at the same time as suggesting he might be the same as them after all. It would appear, however, that Graves was unsure about Riding's suggestion for this line, for in the subsequent typescript the line is altered to reinstate the negative, though this is corrected in Graves's hand, restoring it to Riding's original:

> ~~How~~ might I ~~not~~ too be a walker.

Riding's suggested alterations to 'The Legs' as they appear on these worksheets were all incorporated by Graves, and appear

without change in the published version, showing that he agreed with them, and that her criticism on this occasion was indeed 'constructive' and enabled him to produce a better poem than he might otherwise have done without her collaboration.

Facsimiles of worksheets of 'The Legs' in a proposed sequence of composition

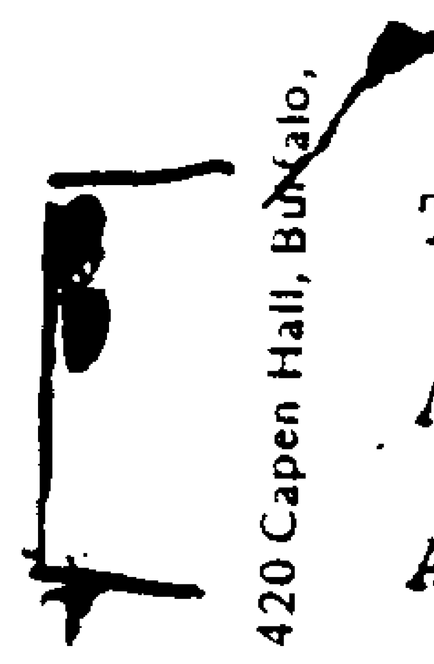
Facsimiles of Graves's worksheets of 'The Legs', from originals now in the possession of the State University of New York at Buffalo.

The ten holograph drafts and one corrected typescript here reproduced are arranged in reverse sequence of what I propose is the order of composition, starting with the typescript and the tenth draft. The tenth and fourth holograph drafts contain amendments in the hand of Laura Riding. That this is her handwriting I have verified by comparison with holograph letters written in the 1920s and 1930s by Riding to Nancy Nicholson, in the possession of the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

Typescript: this is the eleventh draft, with Graves's note to a Spanish printer (it is interesting to note his confusion of Mallorquín, a dialect of Catalan, with Castillian Spanish, in using the word '*mesura*'). The version as first published in *To Whom Else?* is unchanged from this final draft with only two small alterations to punctuation: the omission of a comma at the end of the second line of the seventh verse and of a colon at the end of the second line of the final verse. The latter, however, may have been a typographical error for it is reinstated in the reprinting of the poem in *Collected Poems 1938*. The poem is otherwise unchanged in subsequent editions.

TEXT BOUND INTO

THE SPINE



Componer con esta mesura como antes; no con mas pequeña m como Vd la echo la ultima vez

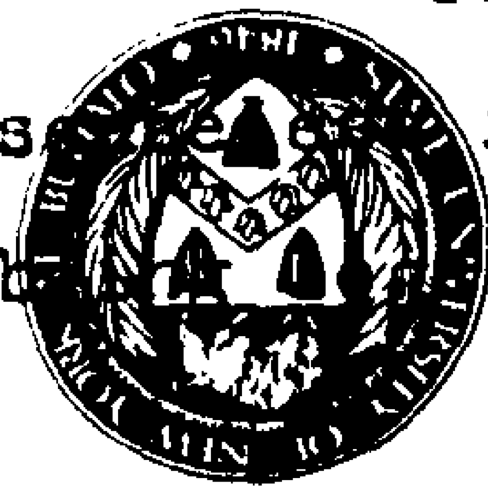
The Legs

There was this road,
And it led up-hill,
And it led down-hill,
And round and in and out.

And the traffic was legs,
Legs from the knees down,
Coming and going,
Never pausing.

And the gutters gurgled
With the rain's overflow,
And the sticks on the pavement
Blindly tapped and tapped.

What drew the legs along
Was the never-stopping,
And the s[illegible] frightening
Fate of b[illegible].



Legs for the road,
The road for legs,
Resolutely nowhere
In both directions.

My legs at least
Were not in that rout,
On grass by the road-side
Entire I stood

Espacio

Watching the unstoppable
Legs go by,
With never a stumble
Between step and step.

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Though my smile was broad
The legs could not see,
Though my laugh was loud
The legs could not hear.

Espacio

My head dizzied then,
I wondered suddenly,
~~How~~ Might I ~~must~~ too be a walker
From the knees down?

Gently I touched my shins,
The doubt unchained them:
They had run in twenty puddles
Before I regained them.

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Tenth holograph draft, with amendments by Laura Riding.

The Legs

There was this road,
And it led up-hill,
And it led down-hill,
And round and in and out.

And the traffic was legs,
~~From~~ Legs from the knees down,
Coming and going,
Never pausing.

And the gutters gurgled
With the rain's overflow,
And the sticks on the pavement
Blindly tapped and tapped.

What drew the legs along
Was the never-stopping,
And the senseless frightening
Fate of being legs.

Legs for the road
The road for legs,
~~Boldly~~ Resolutely nowhere
In ~~Each~~ both directions.

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ace

My legs at least
Were not in that rout,
On grass by the road-side
Entire I stood x
Watching the ~~processional~~ unstoppable
Legs go by, — With never a ~~fault~~ stumble
~~How they limped, hopped, danced,~~
~~Trod fast or slow.~~ Between step and step.

Though my smile was broad
The legs could not ~~see~~,
Though my laugh was loud
The legs could [illegible]ar.
~~My head [illegible]~~ [illegible]hen,
~~Yet laughing [illegible]~~
I wondered suddenly too
~~How this were~~ Might I ~~not~~ be a walker ~~my own legs~~
From the knees down.

Gently I touched my shins,
The doubt unchained them:
They had run in twenty puddles
Before I regained them.

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Ninth holograph draft: this is a draft of only part of the poem, being the first version of the fourth and fifth verses as published.

For the
The road
was
made
For legs to walk

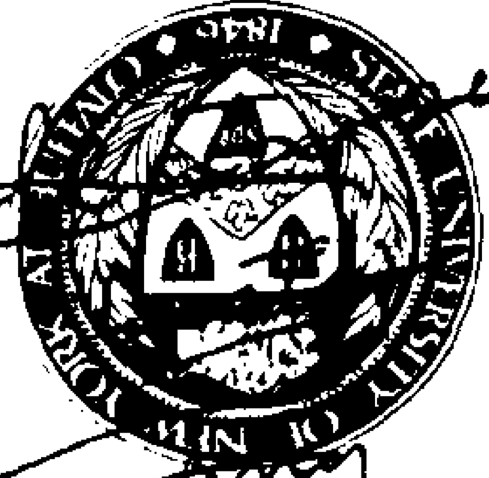
The road went to where
Where
The place legless.

To
legless

What drew the legs along,
The legs could not say
Could not be
Was it only the
Except only the fear
sham
Of stopping dead. Of
standing still

What drew the legs along
Was the not stopping
The fate
being legs
fate of

But where it went



The legs went nowhere
But where they
To the same
nowhere
In both directions

legs for the
road
the road for legs
In both directions
Equally
nowhere

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Eighth holograph draft

The Legs

There was this high-road
And it led up-hill
And it led down-hill
And round and out and in

And the traffic was legs,
Legs from the knees down,
Coming & going,
Never pausing.

And the gutters gurgled
With the rain's overflow,
And the sticks on the pavement
Blindly tapped and

My legs at least
Were ~~not~~ no more among them — Were not in that rout.
On a ~~bank~~ grass by the roadside
~~Smiling~~ Entire I ~~was standing~~ ~~stood~~ stood

What drew the legs along
Was the not-stopping,
And the senseless, frightening
Fate of being legs.

Watching
~~I watched~~ the processional
Legs go by, their united hopping ~~hopping~~
~~Limping~~ How they, ~~dancing~~ [illegible] Trod
~~Walking~~ ~~Going~~ Treading fast or slow.

Though my smile was grin ~~[illegible]~~

The legs could not see,
Though my laugh was lo[ud]
The legs could not hear.

~~[illegible]~~ Even while I laughed
I suddenly wondered
How other were my own legs
From the knees down.

Gently I touched my shins,
The doubt ~~[illegible]~~ unchained them
They had ~~stopped~~ run in twenty puddle[s]
Before I ~~[illegible]~~ regained them. ~~back~~

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Seventh holograph draft

The Legs

There was this high-road,
And it led up-hill,
And it led down-hill,
And round and in and out.

And the traffic was legs,
Legs from the knees down,
Coming & going,
Never pausing.

How the gutters gurgled
With the rain's overflow,
How the sticks on the pavement
Tapped & tapped

My legs, at least,
Were not among them:
My body was entire,
I reclined on grass (stood & smiled)

The road curved by,
Beyond lay nothing green field
This side lay
Not walked by legs.

No rain was falling
Where I was resting
The sun shone warmly,
A linden shaded.

I addressed the genius
Of that pleasant land
Though I did not whisper
The legs could not hear.

I carved a name
On the linden bole;
Though the letters were tall
The legs would not read.

I went to the road to watch
To see the procession
And laughed watching the
Legs go by
Limping dancing
Walking fast or slow.

But even as I laughed
Suddenly I wondered,
How faithful my own were, steady
From the knees down.

Gently I stroked my shin
The touch released them,
They had stepped in
Before I called them back!

Nothing could stop the legs

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Sixth holograph draft: this is a draft of only part of the poem, containing the first draft of the seventh, ninth and tenth verses of the poem as published. The first two verses on the top worksheet make this draft particularly difficult to place in the sequence, for they contain the 'love poem' opening which appears in only one other draft, which I have placed second in the sequence. My reason for identifying these sheets as the sixth draft is that the four other verses appear here for the first time and their subsequent development can be traced through the seventh and later drafts. This positioning, however, is based on the assumption that Graves had decided to reinstate verses one and two - omitted in drafts three to five - only again to decide against them. An alternative explanation would be that some worksheets are missing, creating gaps in the sequence.

addressed with the genius
I

What I said to you, Of that pleasant place

Though we did not whisper
7 The legs could not hear
I carved an invocation
On the beech tree bole

8 What you did with me,
the Celtics were tall
Though we
The legs could not read.

5 The road carved by me
Beyond it nothing,

This side is every place
Unwalked by legs.

I went to the wayside
And laughed, watching the legs,
How they limped, how they danced,
Went fast or slow.

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But ~~even as~~ while yet laughing

~~But you more merrily~~

~~That I who wondered~~ Suddenly I wondered

~~How hard~~ Whether my own ~~legs~~ were steady

From the knees down.

Gently I stroked my shins, ~~then~~

The doubt released them,

They had ~~gone ten paces~~ stepped in twenty puddles

Before I called them back.

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Fifth holograph draft

There was this road,
And it led up hill,
And it led down hill,
And it went round and round; out and in;

And the traffic was legs
Legs from the knees down,
Coming and going,
Never pausing.

How mad the [illegible] puzzled
With the ra[illegible] inflow!
How the sticks of the hind-legs
Tapped & tapped!

Yours legs & mine
Were not among them:
We had our bodies with us
And stood on grass.

All this I touched my shins
The doubt release them
Off
Ten yards
Down the road
But I called them back.
Hoping you had not seen

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But you more freely
Than I who touched my shins
Doubting they were not road legs
From the knees down.

~~And~~ Then for this fancy
My shame condemned me
For a full day to walk
Borders on the road.

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Fourth holograph draft, with amendments by Laura Riding.

The Walkers

84

There was this road,

And it led upward,

And it led downward,

And it went ~~nowhere~~ round and round

~~up and down~~

And the walkers were legs

~~Legs walked the road,~~ they were

~~And the walkers~~

Legs ~~but~~ Only from the knees down,

Coming and going,

Never pausing.

And ~~Lord,~~ How the mud ~~gutters~~ gurgled

With the rain's over-flow!

How the sticks of the blind men legs

Tapped and tapped!

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Your legs and mine
Were not among them:
It was grassy country
Where we were going.

We had our bodies with us
And walked ~~[illegible]~~ on grass.
And we paused often
To sit beside some fountain
On a green bank.

But none ... we should resemble ~~[illegible]~~
How strange—
The ghost-road- walkers, even
Only from the knees down!

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Third holograph draft

There was ~~the~~ road
And it led upward
And it led downward
And it went nowhere,

Legs walked the road
Only from the knee down
Coming and going,
~~In both~~ passing
Never stopped!

Lord, how the gutters gurgled
With the rains overflow.
How the sticks of the blind men
Tapped and tapped ~~a spirit~~,
~~How~~ strange
~~But~~ none the less ~~it though~~ it
that you seemed reasonably
~~How unusual~~
To ~~resemble the~~ be a walker even
Only from knees down.

Your legs & mine
Were not among them
~~There was another path~~ grass road
It was ~~green~~ wild country
Where we were walking.

~~We had our bodies with us~~
~~From the ... up~~
~~Knees~~

We had our bodies
with us
And we paused often
To sit beside ~~stone~~. fountain

On a green bank.

But none the less
It was ~~limitation~~ our curiosity matter
To ~~resemble the~~ be seen as like walkers even
Only
Even from the
Knees down

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Second holograph draft

What you said to me,
What I said to you,
Though we did not whisper
The legs could not hear.

The road ~~encircled~~ us,
Beyond was nothing,
~~Inside~~ was everything
Unwalked by legs.

We stood at the road-side

And laughed, w[...] the legs
How they limped, how they danced,
Went fast or slow.

But you more ~~freely~~ merely
Than I, who ~~stroked my shins~~
~~To feel they were not road legs~~
From the knees down.

What you did with me
What I did with you
Though we hid nothing
The legs could not see
~~How faithful~~
were my own legs
From the knees
down.

But you more nearly
wondered
Than I who doubted

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Your lips and mine
Were not among them:
We had our bodies with us
And walked on grass.

What you said to me,
What I said to you,
Though we ~~shouted loud the lips~~ did not whisper
~~Could never hear~~ The lips could never not hear
~~Had no ears to hear~~.

What more could the lips do
But walk the road?
They could [illegible] they could limp,
Go fast or slow.

One day at morning from the road-side
~~Often One day the~~
~~Sometimes~~ from a ~~hillock~~
We lay ~~watching~~ We watched the ~~pageant~~, legs
~~Limping~~ hopping dancing
~~How they limped~~, how they ~~danced~~
~~Went~~ Going fast or slow.

The ~~round~~ road went all
~~went around~~,
~~Bounding green~~ about
Beyond was ~~country~~ nothing.
~~Where were~~
Enclosed ~~there was~~
a green was ~~of~~ on
Of ~~the forest~~ [illegible]
distance
Of watch-meai[illegible]

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First holograph draft: two pages of random ideas and phrases arranged informally, which suggests this was the starting point of the poem's composition, and illustrates Graves's point that all his poems 'grow from a small verbal nucleus'[128]. Such a nucleus would 'suddenly appear' and 'predetermines the whole'[129].

Always
again confessed
With shame how
How closely I resembled
The ghost road walkers, even
Only from the knees down.

You laughed,
but I recalled

Your laugh was free
Not mine:

But you more freely
Than I, who fancied

my legs felt

You could afford to laugh more freely.

To prove myself not ghostly
who knew with shame
Than I, who

These ghost though even walkers

Only Even from the knees down

How my legs were ghostly

laughed more freely who knew

Though but Only from the knees down

fancied

My legs looked so ghostly

if only

from the knees down.

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Always
again confessed
With shame how
How closely I resembled
The ghost road walkers, even
Only from the knees down.

You laughed,
but I recalled

But you more freely
Than I, who thought
felt

Your laugh was free
Not mine:

myshin felt

To prove myself
not ghostly
who knew with shame

You could afford to laugh more freely
Than I, who long resembled
These ghost walkers

Even from
the knees down / How
legs were ghostly

Only from the knees down

you
more
freely who
I,
legs
legs
road walker's

Only from
the knees
down
ghostly
fancied
My legs
looked so
if only

From the knees down.

Only

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But you move freely

Than I, who touched my chins not road-legs

Doubting my own

From the knees down fancy

And forthwith

action

My shame

Of doubt condemned me

walk full day walk

To

A leg on the road.

Unse

Bodie

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NOTES

1. GTAT29, p. 444.

2. RG, *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, p. 18.

3. Riding, 'Excerpts From A Recording (1972), Explaining the Poems', in *The Poems of Laura Riding*, p. 419.

4. Wexler, p. 23.

5. RPG-2, p. 78.

6. A term frequently employed by Riding in *The World and Ourselves* (1938) as discussed later in this chapter.

7. *Contemporary Techniques of Poetry*, p. 19.

8. Riding had been educated 'sternly' in the 'political faith' of her socialist father, who hoped she would become 'an American Rosa Luxembourg' (MSS-S, p. 123). However, by the time she was fifteen years old she had rejected his political beliefs and acquired an independence of thought which would eschew all orthodox political ideologies.

9. Wexler, p. 26.

10. Riding, 'Excerpts From A Recording (1972), Explaining the Poems', in *The Poems of Laura Riding*, p. 419.

11. Donald Davie, 'Impersonal and Emblematic' in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1977), p. 77.

12. *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*, p. 63.

13. In particular, see the 1961 Oxford lecture 'The Personal Muse' and the three Oxford lectures of the Michaelmas Term, 1963.

14. In *Mrs Fisher, or the Future of Humour*, quoted and discussed in MS-S, p. 115.

15. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 15 *passim*.

16. Introduction to *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xxiv.

17. *The White Goddess*, p. 257.

18. See *The White Goddess*, p. 482: 'It is only in backward parts of Southern and Western Europe that a lively sense still survives in the countryside of their continued worship [of the Goddess]'.

19. 'Epilogue' in GTAT57, p. 282 (not in GTAT29).

20. *The White Goddess*, p. 17 and p. 23.

21. *Ibid*, p. 23.

22. *Ibid*, p.17.

23. *Ibid*.

24. *Ibid*, p. 23.

25. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh, 3 February 1915, p. 31..

26. *The White Goddess*, p. 482.

27. *Ibid*, pp. 476-477.

28. *Ibid*, p. 479.

29. As summarised by Graves in *The Long Week-End*, p. 437.

30. *Ibid*.

31. *Ibid*.

32. Riding, *The World and Ourselves*, p. 122.

33. *The White Goddess*, p. 14.

34. MS-S, p. 432.

35. *Ibid*.

36. *The White Goddess*, pp. 481-482.

37. *On English Poetry*, p. 13.

38. *Ibid*, p. 85.

39. RG, *On Poetry, Collected Talks and Essays*, p. 236.

40. *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*, p. 10.

41. *Ibid*.

42. *Ibid*; see also p. 60.

43. 'Nietzsche', from *Epilogue I* (1935), reprinted in *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry 1922-1949* (1949), pp. 225-234. The essay attempts to characterise Nietzsche's 'Germanism' and discusses *Ecce Homo* as 'the most violent statement of Germanism on record'.

44. Friedriech Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Translation used: Shaun Whiteside, Penguin Books, 1993 (all page references refer to this edition) p. 14.

45. *Ibid*, p. 17.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid*, p. 79.

48. *The White Goddess*, p. 17.

49. *Ibid*, p. 439.

50. For an account of Graves's interest in hallucinogenic mushrooms and their relationship to ancient religious rites and poetic inspiration, see O'PREY-2, pp. 52-56, 85-87, 93-94, 107-110, 121, 138-139, 145-149, 152, and 155-159. See also 'The Two Births of Dionysus' in *Difficult Questions, Easy Answers* (1972), the Foreword to the 1960 revision of *The Greek Myths*, as well as *Food for Centaurs* (1960).

51. *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 14.

52. *Ibid*, p. 25.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid*, p. 26.

55. *Ibid*, p. 14.

56. From the poem 'In Dedication', later called 'The White Goddess'. It originally appeared as a poetic preface to *The White Goddess*.

57. *Oxford Address on Poetry*, p. 24.

58. *On English Poetry*, p. 26.

59. *The White Goddess*, p. 14.

60. *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*, p. 10.

61. *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.

62. *Ibid*, p. 11.

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 97.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*, p. 12.

67. Foreword to *Collected Poems, 1965*.

68. *But It Still Goes On*, p. 217.

69. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 147.

70. *Ibid*, p. 109.

71. 'A Prophecy or a Plea', in *The Reviewer*, p. 7.

72. *Authors Takes Sides on the Spanish Civil War* (*Left Review, 1937*). This consisted of published 'answers' by many 'writers and poets' to a 'question' drawn up and signed by twelve writers, including Aragon, Auden, Nancy Cunard, Pablo Neruda, Ramón Sender, Stephen Spender and Tristan Tzara. The 'question' asked them if they were 'for, or against, the legal Government and People of Republican Spain', and 'for, or against, Franco and Fascism?'. 127 of the replies published supported the Republican government, while only 5 (including Blunden) expressed support for Franco.

73. Valentine Cunningham, *British Writers of the Thirties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 438.

74. In particular, *The Long Week-End*, pp. 334-337; MS-S, pp. 262 ('They [Graves and Riding] both hated German and Italian fascism, and there are many references to this in Graves's diary'), 296, 324 and 364 ('Graves was surprised ...and dismayed... when Franco won Spain'); O'PREY-1, pp. 265-266, 272, 279-280, and 343 ('Naturally we don't love Franco...').

75. *The Long Week-End*, p. 334.

76. *Ibid*, p. 337.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid*, p. 411.

80. RPG-2, p. 238.

81. *The Long Week-End*, p. 338.

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*

84. For an account of which authors declined to contribute to *Authors Take Sides*, see Cunningham, pp. 438-439.

85. Quoted in *Spanish Front: Writers on the Civil War* (anthology), ed. C. V. Cunningham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 51. Cunningham also includes a selection of responses, pp. 52-57.

86. *The Long Weekend*, p. 338.

87. *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, p. 163.

88. GTAT29, p. 398.

89. Riding, *The World and Ourselves*, p. 500.

90. Graves's attitude to the 'crowd', particularly as it manifests itself in 'The Legs' and *But It Still Goes On*, is discussed later in this chapter. See also notes 103, 104, 105 and 112.

91. *The White Goddess*, p. 482.

92. In particular, the lectures given as Professor of Poetry at Oxford 1961-1965, published in *Oxford Addresses on Poetry* (1961), *Mammon and the Black Goddess* (1965) and *Poetic Craft and Principle* (1967). See also the lecture given in New York, 1957, 'The White Goddess', published in the U.S. in *On Poetry: Collected Talks and Essays* (1969).

93. *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*, p. 12.

94. For an account of the projected book with Eliot and how it was superseded by the collaboration with Riding, see O'PREY-1, pp. 161-169. In a letter to Eliot (18 September 1926) he explained that not writing with Eliot enabled him to discuss Eliot's own poems, 'and without your work a discussion of modernist poetry is *Hamlet* without... well... at least... the Gravediggers and the Ghost. There is no Prince of Denmark obviously discoverable'. Eliot was in fact one of the most discussed of contemporary poets in *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, and is treated with more seriousness and respect than any other, but the authors observe a 'gradual disintegration of his poetry since the *The Waste Land*' (pp. 265-266).

95. *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, p. 163.

96. *Ibid*, p. 155.

97. *Ibid*, p. 178.

98. *Ibid.*

99. *Ibid*, p. 124.

100. See 'Why I Live in Majorca' (1953) in *Majorca Observed* (1957) p. 7.

101. Quoted in Cunningham, p. 266. Cunningham discusses the attitude to the crowd of Eliot, Lewis, Lawrence, Waugh and other writers of the period, pp. 266-295.

102. *Ibid*, p. 266.

103. Graves, 'Postscript to *Goodbye To All That*' in *But It Still Goes On*, p. 43.

104. *But It Still Goes On*, p. 293. The play was published in *But It Still Goes On*, pp. 210 - 315, but has never been performed in a commercial theatre. There was an amateur performance in the 'amphitheatre' at Deià in 1991. The amphitheatre is on Graves's land and was the location for a light-hearted summer 'play' written by him every year, in which he himself would act, along with friends and other members of the family.

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*

107. Riding, *The World and Ourselves*, p. 500.

108. *Ibid.*

109. *Ibid*, pp. 500-501.

110. GTAT29, p. 281.

111. *Ibid*, p. 446.

112. 'Postscript to *Goodbye To All That*' in *But It Still Goes On*, p. 43.

113. Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921); authorized translation by James Strachey, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1922), pp. 14-15.

114. *Ibid*, p. 19.

115. *Ibid*, p. 10.

116. *Ibid*, p. 9.

117. *Ibid*, p. 10.

118. *Ibid*, p. 12.

119. See Christopher Badcock's commentary on Freud's theory in *Essential Freud* (Blackwell, 1988): 'Looked at from another, characteristically psychoanalytic point of view, what we see in a group or crowd is a case of temporary *regression* in which the ego loses the differentiation which it acquires in the course of maturing and begins to dissolve back into the id from which it came. This is why intelligence, sense of individuality and moral standards all undergo degradation in the group...' (p. 128).

120. See note 119 above.

121. *The Crowning Privilege*, p. 122.

122. *Ibid*

123. *Ibid.*

124. Riding, 'Excerpts From A Recording (1972), Explaining the Poems', in *The Poems of Laura Riding*, p. 419.

125. That these annotations are in Riding's own handwriting I have verified by comparing holograph letters written by Riding to Nancy Nicholson in the 1930s, in the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

126. *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xxiv.

127. MS-S, pp. 236-237.

128. *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, p. 43.

129. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 176.

CHAPTER SEVEN

'THROUGH NIGHTMARE':

THE BREAK WITH RIDING

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CHAPTER SEVEN

'THROUGH NIGHTMARE':

THE BREAK WITH RIDING

'Against kind' and 'as dead'

On April 29, 1929, Riding jumped out of the window of the fourth floor flat she shared with Graves in London. Graves's immediate reaction to this was to run down a flight of stairs and jump after her from the third floor window, and considerable speculation has surrounded the motive behind this second jump. Richard Perceval Graves portrays it as an impulsive suicide attempt by Graves:

> As soon as Laura had thrown herself from the window, Robert Graves began running downstairs. Perhaps to begin with he was hoping to save Laura somehow; but when he had taken no more than a dozen steps, he realised that she must by now be dead. What remained but to join her in death?

> Reaching the third floor, he forced open a window overlooking the yard in which Laura's body lay, and flung himself out.[1]

In a footnote to this passage, R. P. Graves admits he is engaging in 'speculative interpretation' for which he has no supporting evidence[2]. Alternative views suggest that Graves made a 'cautious' suicide attempt, one which he subconsciously intended to survive; or that he was rashly, and somewhat heroically, trying to reach Riding - in order to help her - by the quickest means possible, the alternative being a circuitous route around the outside of the house[3]. None of these cases rests on anything more than circumstantial evidence, though the last would seem the most plausible theory, for several reasons. Graves was, first of all, athletically built and had a reputation at the Front for personal courage, and although 'winded', he was able to recover quickly enough to help Riding into the ambulance[4]. Such an action, in which he put his personal safety second in order to do whatever he could to save Riding, was at least consistent with his character, and with his intense feelings for her. This interpretation is also supported by the absence of any evidence to suggest that Graves had attempted suicide. There are a number of contemporary accounts of the incident, none of which talks of Graves trying to kill himself: Graves's own letters[5]; Riding's introduction to 'Poems: A Joking Word', her story 'Obsession', and her novel *14A*; Frank O'Connor's account in *My Father's Son*[6]; and T. E. Lawrence's letters describing the events to Charlotte Shaw[7].

More significant even than the absence of a suggestion of suicide in the documentary evidence, is the lack of any suicidal theme in either Graves's autobiography or his poems; in a writer who drew so directly on personal emotional experiences, and who so recently had committed himself to 'telling the truth' about himself, such an absence would be extraordinary if he had indeed tried to kill himself and failed.

Riding herself treated the subject of her jump in various cryptic accounts, in one of which she reveals an 'obsession' with a conflict between her different 'natures', characterised by madness and death, which her jump resolved in a paradoxical way:

> I feared heights with the same fear by which I was able to leap down a height, and I feared death with the same fear by which I was able to die... . Perhaps you would call me mad. Indeed, if you will not call me dead, I do not see how you can help calling me mad... . I think you had better give in and agree as well that death is my nature.[8]

For Riding her near-death was a release from the 'madness' of 'life'. It allowed her to begin a new life in which her 'true quality' was an ability to live 'invisibly, against kind, as dead, beyond event'[9]. She was now, 'literally', 'more than human', because she had ended her life and yet was somehow still living, beyond 'time' and 'history' - which allowed her a unique insight into 'truth'. According to Joyce Wexler, Riding looked back on

her suicidal leap as 'an act of will that had allowed her to shed her personal identity and enter a universal state of being':

> Surviving her fall became a kind of sanctification. She wrote of having died and assumed an extraordinary perspective from which to address everyone still confined in ordinary life. She used her survival as a symbol of the differences between her ability to focus on thought and others' inability to escape their immediate circumstances.[10]

Graves, it will be remembered, also believed that he 'really did die' at the Somme, and had somehow been re-born[11]. For him it was an experience which produced a sense of confusion and doubt about his sense of identity. The 'newer' Graves was a 'substitute' or 'ghost', a 'representative' of his true or 'lost' self[12], but Riding now gave the impression that such a pseudo-death made it possible to change or 'refashion' identity, and live in freedom of 'event' and 'kind' - Graves's terms for the historical, social and familial contexts from which he himself had been struggling to escape.

If Graves did not intend 'to join [Riding] in death', as Richard Graves suggests, in writing *Goodbye To All That* he was nonetheless acting out what might be seen as a metaphorical suicide. The autobiography ends with the observation that it had taken only two months to write: 'I began to write my autobiography on May 23rd and write these words on July 24th, my thirty-fourth birthday'[13]. He then looks forward to 'another

month of final review', at which point 'I shall have parted with myself for good'[14]. The sense of parting, of saying a 'ruthless' 'goodbye to everyone'[15], including himself, is a direct reference to Riding's 'final' words to Graves, Nancy Nicholson and Geoffrey Phibbs as she climbed onto the window ledge and jumped: 'goodbye chaps'[16]. In the 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding' which concluded the first edition of *Goodbye To All That*, Graves, reverting to the oblique and cryptic style of Riding herself, warns that it would be 'false' to see the book as having been 'written forward from where I was'[17]. In other words, the roots of his 'story', which is 'one of gradual disintegration'[18] of his early character and identity, are not to be found in the detailed account of his family background with which he had begun. Instead, the autobiography has been written 'backward from where you [Riding] are' - 'against kind' and 'beyond event'[19]. By writing the book he had earned the right to join her 'as dead', renouncing the world and his former self which had belonged to the world:

> 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, making and losing friends, enduring blindly in time; instead of here outside, writing this letter to you, as one also living against kind - indeed, rather against myself.[20]

Graves was seeking liberation through this literary 'mock suicide', rather than any form of self-destruction. Riding had achieved such liberation by cutting herself off from her past life in a sudden, dramatic action, and Graves believed he could join her in this new 'objectivity', 'outside' of the constraining influences of society. Riding acknowledged Graves's 'renunciation' of the world in the Preface to *Poems: A Joking Word* (1930) when she describes him as one 'who was about to finish with that kind of thing', just as she 'had already finished'[21]. However, Graves was not to achieve a wholly independent 'objectivity' like Riding, he had not completely shaken off his mortal identity. His 'nature' was still 'life' whereas hers was 'death', and for this reason he continued to be dependent on her authority. In 'To Whom Else?' he described himself as 'man in man ended', while she was more than this, being 'not of man'. Riding defined the difference between them in similar terms in her long poem 'Laura and Francisca', in which 'Robert' is a 'living self' whereas she is 'death's selfless person':

> Dear Robert, if you break,
> Holding your living self of man
> Against death's selfless person...

'Dear Robert' is something of a comic figure in the poem, someone who 'fetches', and whose 'imperfections' are explained by his being only 'human':

He's human, by every imperfection
He's made a dogged art of...

Riding's influence on 'To Whom Else?'

In 'To Whom Else?' Graves 'dedicates' himself to Riding in gratitude for his redemption at her 'merciless' but 'loving' hands:

To whom else other than,
To whom else not of man
Yet in human state,
Standing neither in stead
Of self nor idle godhead,
Should I, man in man ended,
Myself dedicate?

Graves suppressed this poem in 1947, perhaps for personal reasons because it expresses his submission to Riding's authority in its most abject stage, and because it asserts Riding's 'holiness' which he later denied. The first verse establishes the hierarchy of their relationship in the new 'objective' order of things. Although they were both 'as dead', Graves was still only 'man', subject to the finite constraints of time and space. 'To Whom Else?' is by no means a conventional love poem - sex and 'relationships' were very much part of 'that kind of thing' which they had renounced -

but is a quasi-religious litany of personal devotion and dedication, of a strictly spiritual kind:

> To whom else momently,
> To whom else endlessly,
> But to you, I?
> To you who only,
> To you who mercilessly,
> To you who lovingly,
> Plucked out the lie?

Gratitude for his salvation and for being allowed to join her 'in truth' leads to the final renunciation not just of the world but of individual selfhood:

> With great astonishment
> Thankfully I consent
> To my estrangement
> From me in you.

The manuscript worksheets of 'To Whom Else?' again provide a useful insight into Graves's thinking in the process of composition, and show further evidence of Riding's actual influence on the wording of a poem. Nine holograph drafts and three corrected typescripts are extant in the Buffalo collection. The first two drafts are of a short poem, consisting of ten lines in the first version, expanded to fourteen in the second, and the emphasis in both these drafts is on the poet's self-questioning of

his own identity. The second draft begins with a question which recalls 'A Letter from Wales':

> Who ~~are you?~~ am I? ~~Horus is my name.~~

Although 'Horus' is struck through in the first line, it is restored as the identity of the narrator in the tenth:

> Horus-Apollo is ~~your~~ my name.

'Horus' is the title of the poem in the third draft, with an explanation in parenthesis that this is 'the God whom the Greeks knew in different aspects as Apollo as Dionysus and as Pluto'. There are numerous mentions of 'the Child Horus' in Graves's *The Greek Myths*, but the poem as it appears in these early drafts is concerned with one element in particular of the complex mythology associated with the god:

> Horus was avenging Set's murder of his father Osiris - the sacred king, beloved of the triple Moon-goddess Isis, or Lat, whom his tanist sacrificed at midsummer and midwinter, and of whom Horus was himself the reincarnation.[22]

The poem is an act of self- 'dedication' by Horus to Isis, who is described in the fifth draft as 'the laurelled Queen, / Measure and Order'. That the poet identifies himself with Horus, and Riding

with Isis, is evident in the several autobiographical allusions in the early drafts:

> What is your ~~birth~~ feast day?
> The twenty-fourth day of July.
>
> (Second draft)
>
> ~~And died the same day he ceased to be a child.~~
>
> (First draft, struck though in ms.)

These lines refer, respectively, to Graves's birthday and to the official record of his death on his twenty-first birthday in 1916. There are further autobiographical allusions in the fourth draft, with punning on both their names. Thus Horus is 'Child of the Grave', while Isis is portrayed 'Riding the cloudy wrack of ~~havoc~~ storm'. In the same draft Isis is praised for having 'ransomed' the poet from 'death', and there is a reference, struck through, to Riding's role in the break-up of Graves's first marriage:

> ~~And~~ From the ~~breast~~ bonds ~~breast~~ of ~~my wife~~ caprice

This fourth draft takes the final eight lines of the previous draft, in which Horus 'dedicates' himself to Isis, and places them at the beginning:

> Follows a dedication
> Of all that I am and ~~shall~~ may be,
> Of all I am and am,
> ~~T~~ Not to these, ~~not~~ to these, to those -

There can be no partition -
But to you finally and wholly.
To whom else reasonably?
To whom else?

The subsequent twenty lines consist largely of a description of Horus and Isis and their relationship, which in the fifth draft is distilled down to nineteen lines which it would appear Graves considered to be in almost final form, given that the worksheet is a 'clean' copy virtually without correction, and is in Graves's neatest handwriting as if ready for the typist:

I, Brightness of the Sun,
Travel of the Vine,
Child of the Grave,
Born on the twentieth day of Ephiphi...
To you the laurelled queen,
Measure and Order,
Never yet until now,
Pale browed and swift one
Tokened by the moon
Riding the cloudy wrack of storm,
To you, the excellent, the only,
Wisdom of the owl,
Who led me out from death,
From the fangs of the foul Python,
From the bonds of Caprice,
To you henceforth and always
To you I make devotion,
To whom else reasonably? ~~or~~
To whom else?

However, the whole of this draft of the poem was from here on in the process of composition, rejected except for the three words of the last line. By the sixth draft, the shape of the poem has changed beyond recognition from earlier versions, though it closely resembles the final version as published in 1929. In the 'new' version, proper names have been removed, making the 'dedication' an anonymous pledge from 'a vain man in man ended', to an unspecified female human deity, who is 'not of man / Yet in human state, / Standing neither in stead / Of self nor ~~other~~ ~~idle~~ ~~vain~~ vain godhead'.

In the eighth draft (attached as Appendix 2) there are a number of annotations in Riding's hand, and again her use of pencil allows one to establish which are her crossings-out and which are Graves's. Riding's correction of this poem is a dramatic instance of her influence over Graves in both literary and personal matters, given that it is a love poem dedicated to her. An analysis of these corrections suggests that her influence on this poem is more than purely literary, being perhaps also driven by her own private feelings about their relationship. In the second stanza the anonymous 'you' to whom the poem is now addressed is described as 'madly' and 'mercilessly' plucking 'out the lie', suggesting an element of insanity, cruelty and even violence in the character of the beloved. Riding's amendments here remove any such negative connotations and instead infer that although the poet may have suffered at her hands, she herself has only been acting

altruistically in his interest and out of love for him. Here the crossing out of the single word 'mad' is by Graves, the other crossing out is by Riding, while her additions are in italic:

> To you who ~~mad~~ only,
> ~~To you who madly,~~
> To you who mercilessly,
> *To you who lovingly,*
> Plucked out the lie?

These amendments were incorporated without change into the final version as published.

The third verse in the eighth draft was omitted in subsequent versions, but its correction by Riding again suggests that at least part of her intention was to deflect negative comments about her as the subject of the poem. In the first line 'you' is described as 'free of wit'. 'Fun' was part of 'all that' Graves had bid goodbye to in the 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding' at the end of the 1929 edition of *Goodbye To All That*, as having no place 'beyond event'[23]. However, Riding has crossed out 'wit' and substituted 'wish', thus removing the negative suggestion that she is perhaps humourless and again stating her altruistic motives:

> To whom else free of ~~wit~~ *wish*

Her correction of the remainder of this verse was restricted to crossing words out. All of the following strike-throughs are in pencil on the manuscript:

> To whom else ~~whole in spirit~~,
> Beyond love, true?
> My body's action,
> ~~My mind'~~s correction,
> ~~My being's~~ satisfaction;
> I to you.

Riding's removal of 'whole in spirit' is a forceful counter to any charge of self-interest in her correction of this poem. The rhythmic flatness of Graves's verse, caused by the rhetorical repetition of syntactical constructions in lines one to two and four to six, is successfully disrupted by her alterations, which introduce a more vigorous rhythm and sinewy syntax characteristic of her own poems. However, a subtle and significant shift in meaning is also achieved. What Graves had envisaged as a description of his complete self, body, mind and spirit, has been restricted by Riding to refer to the body alone. In 1928 Riding had recorded her dislike of sex, which was 'boring' for women, who 'to save themselves from boredom' were 'obliged' to 'enliven the scene with a few falsetto turns', which were mistakenly interpreted by men as 'co-operation'[24]. After her fall she renounced sex altogether, declaring that 'bodies have had their day'[25], and as a disciple Graves was required to accept

the truth of this and renounce all sexual activity as well, though he encountered some difficulty in trying to achieve this[26]. For men in general she somewhat cryptically recommended 'the relief... of sexual suicide'[27]. 'My body's action, correction, satisfaction', which is her suggested revision, has a Graves struggling to cope with an involuntary celibacy admit that his sexual drive is something that requires correction from an external authority (perhaps also inferring that his own self-discipline is insufficient) and that acceptance of this correction will result in a form of contentment. This would represent, if true, the fulfilment of Galatea's promise in 'Pygmalion to Galatea' to 'wake' the poet from the 'bonds of sullen flesh'. However, that Graves omitted this verse entirely in the poem as published invites speculation that in its revised form it no longer represented his true feelings either towards Riding physically or to his own attitude to sex and celibacy.

The 'estrangement' from, or denial of, selfhood espoused in the last two lines of 'To Whom Else?' ('My estrangement/From me in you') took Graves into 'a new region', in 'The Terraced Valley', and presented him with 'New Legends' in which he expressed 'content' at his 'oneness' with a range of female mythical figures or deities:

> Content in you,
> Mad Atalanta,

Stooping unpausing,
Ever ahead,
Acquitting me of rivalry.

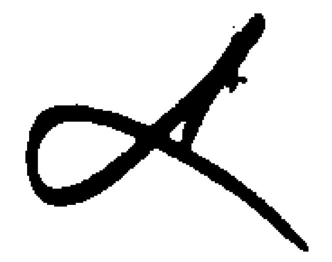
...

Content in you
Niobe of no children
Nor of calamity.

Content in you,
Helen, foiler of beauty.

One can see in this a movement away from 'dedication' to Riding as an individual divinity or 'goddess' towards a faith in a general female deity which was to be systematized in his 'discovery' of the 'ancient' cult of the White Goddess. Graves wished to make poetry a form of religious activity in which ultimate truth was pursued through language expressive of private truth. He identified this ultimate truth, which poetry pursued and on which it depended, with a goddess or 'muse' for the first time in 'To The Sovereign Muse', published in 1938. This is an informal, conversational poem, later dropped from the canon, but significant for its insight into the timing and nature of Graves's earliest thinking on the relation between an ancient goddess mythology and the problems of contemporary poetry, which, as he saw it, was in decline:

Debating here one night we reckoned that



> Between us we knew all the poets
> Who bore that sacred name: none bore it clear,
> Not one...

The problem of modern poets is that they are all 'lawyers', 'moralists', or 'pantomimists' whose verse only parodies a true 'magnificence they feared to acclaim'. The true purpose of poetry, which these 'clerks' who draft 'conveyances on moral sheepskins' do not see, is 'praise' of the 'sovereign Muse'. Poets should 'devote' their 'pride' to her 'love', for she 'plucks' 'the speech thread from a jargon tangled / Fleece of a thousand tongues, wills, voices, / To be a single speech, twisted fine...'. The repetition of the word 'plucks' recalls Riding's plucking 'out the lie' in 'To Whom Else?', while the 'Jargon tangled fleece of a thousand tongues' looks further back to 'The Cool Web', and offers a solution to the then seemingly intractable problem of describing experience truthfully through language. In 'The Cool Web' the poet sought to preserve the integrity or sanity of the self by an evasive description of reality. Here, however, as in 'Warning to Children', the poet looks beyond this subjective perception of experience to an objective source of truth which exists independently of the 'finite', and which not only offers hope of meaning but also of survival. In 'To the Sovereign Muse' this survival refers to ~~of~~ the poet's work, which by being able to engage with the truth offered by the muse, will achieve what Graves was later to call 'durability'[28]. Achievement of this durability will release the muse poets from being 'poets of the

passionate change' - in other words allow them to be more than 'mere servant[s] and interpreter[s] of civilization'[29]. Such independence from civilization will end their need to 'claim the indulgence of the hour', blaming their artistic and spiritual inadequacies on the vagaries and constraints of the 'present age'.

Isolation and the break with Riding

'Largesse to the Poor' is the most confident celebration of the apparent independence Graves felt he had achieved through leaving England, and again the point made is not that he has escaped from a particular moment or particular place in time, but from time itself. It looks back on a past which was misspent in the pursuit of practical advantage:

> I had been God's own time on travel
> From stage to stage, guest-house to guest-house,
> And at each stage furnished one room
> To my own comfort, hoping God knows what...

'Travel' here is the same restless, pointless movement that had been the automatic, group behaviour of 'the legs', and again it is the cessation of movement, the ability to stand still, which metaphorically distinguishes the poet from the crowd. It is, the poet confesses, an ability he has only recently gained. He

considers his past 'to his own shame' but considers with relief the new state of awareness and consciousness:

> But now at last, out of God's firmament,
> To break this endless journey -
> Homeless to come where all awaits me
> That in my mind's unwearying discontent
> I place by place foreknew -
> I fling my keys as largesse to the poor,
> The always travel-hungry God-knows-who,

Although Graves may have felt 'free at last' from God's 'firmament', he had entered a new 'firmament' ruled by a much less benign deity. Riding continued to be ambitious 'in the world' and set about creating in Deià an intellectual community over which she had complete domain. T. S. Matthews was one of the writers who joined this group despite initial misgivings:

> I saw that the price of admission to Laura's circle was the same for everyone: fealty to her as the acknowledged and absolute monarch of her little kingdom. (Queendom it should be; for in her world the rule was matriarchal and God herself a woman).[30]

The group was an 'hermetic community'[31] dominated by a single ungainsayable authority, and Matthews's description of Graves's position in this new order contains little sense of his freedom or independence:

> [Graves] was more than protective of her; he seemed in a constant swivet of anxiety to please her, to forestall her every wish, like a small boy dancing attendance on a rich aunt of uncertain temper. And she treated him - like a dog. There was no prettier way to put it... . The answer to this puzzling relation finally forced itself on me: she was not so much his mistress as his master: he was *in statu pupillari* to her - at times he seemed like Caliban to her Prospero.[32]

Rumours of curious proceedings in Deià began to circulate in literary circles. One, which surfaced as a story for *Time* and which Matthews was able to stop because he wrote reviews for the magazine (which he was later to edit), said that the two 'eccentric poets' lived 'in a mountain fastness in Mallorca surrounded by a walled courtyard', and set 'savage dogs' on unwelcome visitors[33]. Although of course inaccurate, the idea of a 'fastness' and a 'walled courtyard' guarded by savage dogs is suggestive of the group's isolation and its hostile attitude to outsiders, and coincidentally this same imagery occurs in one of Graves's most troubled poems, 'The Castle', which reverts back to the nightmare, haunted world of *The Pier-Glass*:

> Walls, mounds, enclosing corrugations
> Of darkness, moonlight on dry grass.
> Walking this courtyard, sleepless, in fever,
> Planning to use - but by definition
> There's no way out, no way out -
> Rope-ladders, baulks of timber, pulleys,
> A rocket whizzing over the walls and moats -
> Machines easy to improvise. No escape...

The war is clearly still a disturbing presence in Graves's consciousness, but an element previously absent from his war poetry makes an appearance here, and that is the sense of being trapped, enclosed, and the need to break out. The poet-soldier is not seeking to defend his castle, or maintain it during a prolonged siege, but is intent on working out how to 'escape'. The final two lines identify this as not merely a dream or nightmare of previous battles fought, but as his actual state of mind while awake:

> And die and wake up sweating in moonlight
> In the same courtyard, sleepless as before.

'The Castle' was published in December 1929 and is therefore part of the desire for liberation expressed in the 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding' at the end of *Goodbye To All That*. That he failed to achieve that liberation is clear from Matthews's eye-witness account of Graves's life with Riding. All of Graves's writings were now subject to Riding's scrutiny, not just his poems and prose but his private correspondence and even his personal diary[34]. Rather like a novice monk, he was unable to communicate even with himself without being monitored by his spiritual and moral 'authority'. According to Seymour-Smith, Riding disapproved of him writing poems 'about himself', rather than poems 'uncovering truth'[35]. Riding had declared that historic time had effectively come to an end and it was the poet's duty to

recognise this. She 'explained' her 'startling' theory in the *Preliminaries* to *Epilogue I*, the literary magazine edited initially by her and Graves (subsequently by Riding alone):

> All the Chinese bandits having chopped off all the foreign ears, we have time to consider not only the subject *Atrocity*, but the subject *Bandits*, and the subject *Missionaries*, and the subject *Foreigners*, and the subject *Chinese*. All the politicians who are going to be elected have been elected; and all the artificial excitement in events which no one really regards as either very important or very interesting has been exhausted. All the historical events have happened.[36]

The task facing post-historical poets such as Graves, who accepted this 'premiss', was to report 'the single event possible after everything has happened: a determination of values'[37].

Graves began to develop a deep-rooted anxiety about his place in this 'objective' new order, and although he was not 'allowed' to confront this anxiety subjectively, or personally, it emerges as a powerful underlying theme in 'The Terraced Valley', written during their early years together in Mallorca. In this, the poet has successfully 'escaped' the confines of his castle and is in an open, peopleless landscape. The olive terraces at the foot of the mountain, with the 'calm sea beyond', is an unmistakable picture of Deià, which is the 'strange region' Graves has arrived at 'by hazard' and in 'deep thought' of his beloved. However, what begins as a sense of excitement and wonder at reaching this 'new

region', soon turns into unease at his own sense of isolation. The landscape is made strange by the poet's perception of it; a disturbance in his mind turns everything around him 'outside-inside' and the world suddenly seems threatening:

In a deep thought of you and concentration
I came by hazard to a strange region:
The unnecessary sun was not there,
The necessary earth was without care,
Broad sunshine ripened the whole skin
Of ancient earth that was turned outside-in.

Calm sea beyond the terraced valley
Without horizon easily was spread
As it were overhead
Washing the mountain-spurs behind me:
The unnecessary sky was not there,
Therefore no heights, no deeps, no birds of air.

Neat outside-inside, neat below-above,
Hermaphrodising love.
Neat this-way-that-way and without mistake:
On the right hand could slide the left glove.
Neat over-under: the young snake
Through an unbreaking shell his path could break.
Singing of kettles, like a singing brook,
Made out of doors a fireside nook.

Graves had entered this new region with great expectations. He was to live there, with Riding, 'beyond event', 'against kind', 'invisible' to a 'blind' world. They had become 'one', through

Graves's 'estrangement' of himself in her. However, a sense of panic enters the fourth stanza as the poet's unease is seen to be caused by the apparent absence of the beloved. He then searches for her in 'that strange region':

> But found you nowhere in the whole land,
> And cried disconsolately, until you spoke
> Close in the sunshine by me, and your voice broke
> That antique spell with a doom-echoing shout
> To once more inside-in and outside-out.

Graves and Riding had originally gone to Mallorca on the recommendation of Gertrude Stein, who promised them it was 'paradise', but then added warningly, 'if you like paradise'[38]. 'The Terraced Valley' shows Graves entering a new region with expectations of paradise but finding a looking-glass world in which Eve is not only invisible to those 'forever blind' who are still 'among kind', but also to himself, her supposed intimate. She has brought him to this 'strange region' only to abandon him there and the consequent sense of isolation he feels is overwhelming. Her sudden re-appearance at the end of the poem is as alarming as her absence, for she offers not the gentle reassurance of a lover but emits a 'doom-echoing shout' which breaks the 'spell'. According to Matthews, 'there was something occult about Laura and... her domination'[39], and there is in this poem a suggestion that she is able to control Graves's mind in an almost supernatural way. That she possessed certain 'powers'

Graves apparently did not seem to doubt[40]. In 'On Portents', written around the same time as 'The Terraced Valley', he describes in similar vein the apparently mysterious events and 'strange things' which 'happen where she is', as 'tourbillons in Time', caused by 'the strong pulling of her bladed mind / Through that ever reluctant element'. Riding's presence - or absence - is beginning to be described as something violent, dangerous and to be feared - a whirlwind, or a supernatural 'doom-echoing shout'; before long he was to describe her as 'Queen Famine'.

In the final stages of their curious relationship Graves's sense of loneliness and isolation increased. In 1939 they moved to America and shortly afterwards their relationship ended in bitterness and acrimony. Graves had endured Riding's tyranny because he considered her to be 'a kind of deity', and acceptance of her 'personal authority' was the price worth paying for being allowed 'to walk in the shining light of her presence'[41]. He had invested in her responsibility for his own moral and artistic integrity, but in America she had, to his mind, changed completely, as he wrote to Basil Liddell Hart:

> What can I say about Laura? She reached (for me) a point of shall we say poetic (i.e. hyper-moral) excellence that nobody has ever attained before; and then - what shall I say? Her oldest friends consider it an inexplicable abandonment of the principles that she once guarded with the fiercest intensity.

> The explanation is that she has made the centre of her universe no longer herself but Schuyler Jackson and herself, and thus admitted into her scope so many foreign elements that it is difficult to regard her as the same person.[42]

In May of 1939 Graves ended the diary he had kept for a number of years, with the poem, 'The Moon Ends in Nightmare', and a comment that the diary seemed like a 'graveyard'[43]. The poem was not published until 1975 in a special issue of the *Malahat Review* dedicated to Graves[44], and Graves's previous suppression of it was again perhaps due to his continued unease with the emotion it expresses. Because of its suppression the poem has not been considered by critics, although it is mentioned by both of Graves's biographers. It is an important poem because it provides the 'missing link' between the *Collected Poems* published in 1938, when Graves was still in thrall to Riding and his poems had been carefully scrutinized and edited by her, and *Poems 1938-45*. The latter volume opens with 'A Love Story', which looks back on a previous relationship in which it had been 'dangerous... with love notes to serenade Queen Famine', but 'The Moon Ends in Nightmare' records the actual moment when 'the scales fell from his eyes all at once'[45]. The poem appears in the diary as follows:

> I had once boasted my acquaintance
> With the Moon's phases: ~~even~~ I had seen her,
> even
> Endure and emerge from full eclipse.

Yet as she stood in the West, that summer night,
The fireflies dipping insanely about me,
So that the foggy air quivered and winked
And the sure eye was cheated,
In horror I cried aloud: for the same Moon
Whom I had held a living power, though changeless,
Split open in my sight, a bright egg shell,
And a double-headed Nothing grinned
All-wisely from ~~the soft-within~~ the gap.

At ~~that~~ this I found my earth no more substantial
That [*sic*] the lower air, or the upper,
And ran to plunge in the cool flowing creek,
My eyes and ears pressed under water,
And ~~there~~ did I drown~~ed~~, ~~and left~~ leaving my corpse in mud?
Yet still the thing was so.

I crept to where my window beckoned warm
Between the white oak and the tulip tree
And rapped - but was denied, as who returns
After a one-hour-seeming century
To a house not his own.

This is Graves's most complete record of his relationship with Riding, for it traces that relationship from its optimistic beginnings through to the disillusion of realising that she was not after all 'more than human', and the despair of being rejected by her. The poem opens with an account of the wonder Graves had felt in his first 'acquaintance' with Riding, together with the sense of privilege at having been singled out to witness her emergence from 'full eclipse' and to be chosen as her intimate, being allowed

to know her in all her 'phases'. But the 'double-headed Nothing' suggests Riding's loss of 'oneness' by making 'the centre of her universe no longer herself but Schuyler Jackson and herself', while the 'all-wise' 'grin' is a bitter recognition of the falsehood inherent in Riding's claims to a monopoly on truth. Her wisdom, as he now saw it, was an illusion, like an egg which promises the birth of a new life but which is in fact sterile and empty. Graves had originally written that the double-headed Nothing grinned 'from the soft within':

> And a double-headed Nothing grinned
> All-wisely from ~~the soft within~~ the gap.

The phrasing Graves originally intended gives an entirely different impression - of tactile unpleasantness, of revulsion at a soft, deformed embryo, an unnatural mutant or monster whose grotesque and 'all-wise' grin causes the poet to recoil in horror. By crossing this out and substituting it with the less emotive 'gap' Graves achieves more than simple revulsion, he expresses his disillusion in Riding's wisdom by exposing its hollowness. Her transformation from the 'living power' into a meaningless void is more shocking than any metamorphosis into a merely grotesque and physically repellent creature.

This sudden vision of emptiness, and an unwillingness to accept the Moon's self-destruction, causes the poet to plunge his head in

cold water, as if trying to wake himself from nightmare, and as he emerges from the water to realise that it is no dream ('Yet still the thing was so') he wonders whether perhaps the shock is due not to a change in reality but to his own death. In the manuscript he does indeed die and like a spirit leaves his corpse behind in the mud:

> And ~~there~~ did I drown~~ed~~, ~~and left~~ leaving my corpse in mud?

Graves feared that the trauma of Riding's transformation and her rejection of him would result in another breakdown similar to that he experienced in the war. This would mean another pseudo-death, as in 'Escape' and 'A Letter from Wales', and another reconstruction or refashioning of self. That he described this pseudo-death in the imagery of the Somme shows how similar this trauma was in intensity to his suffering of 'shell shock' in the trenches.

'The Door' describes Riding's departure from his life in more gently elegaic terms; again he draws on natural imagery to represent her powerful entry into his life - a sudden, engulfing, unstoppable 'sea' 'which no door could restrain'. Her equally unpredictable, uncontrollable departure, however, is seen as mysterious and unfathomable, but described without the 'horror' or trauma of 'The Moon Ends in Nightmare':

> Yet when at last she smiled, tilting her head
> To take her leave of me,
> Where she had smiled, instead
> There was a dark door closing endlessly,
> The waves receded.

The imagery of the poem is dream-like in its surreal juxtaposition of a sea being held back by a door, as well as with the puzzling concept of a door which is 'endlessly' closing. The latter image clearly indicates departure and loss, but the receding of the waves in the final line ends the poem on a note of relief, as normality is restored. Graves's schooling in Freudian dream analysis made him aware of the potency of such symbols as water, and the anxiety in the dream about being engulfed by a sudden 'sea' of water which he had apparently been trying to resist, suggests a sexual encounter in which he felt overpowered and overrun. The fact that the woman smiles and takes 'her leave' indicates her control of the relationship, from beginning through to the end. Like a 'tourbillon' or tidal wave, Riding had swept into and out of his life with a sudden, overwhelming force which, he concludes, was impossible to foresee or resist.

At the same time as Graves was ending his relationship with Riding he was gradually falling in love with the woman who was to become his second wife. The conflict of intense emotions created by this double upheaval led to a series of lyrics, collected together in *Poems 1938-1945*. The collection contains two

poems, in addition to 'The Door', which look back on the broken affair with Riding with a complex mixture of regret and relief. 'Lament for Pasiphaë' is an elegaic lament for lost love, the somewhat conventional opening of which recalls the poetry written after the collapse of his first marriage, but the second stanza hints compellingly at mysterious and extraordinary events. 'Love' has not died in any conventional sense, as in 'One Hard Look', 'The Christmas Robin' or 'Lost Love'; rather the poet is mourning the death of 'truth'. His love has not left him, nor has she been 'faithless', but has 'resigned' her right to be loved by her betrayal of her own embodiment of 'truth':

> Faithless she was not: she was very woman,
> Smiling with dire impartiality,
> Sovereign, with heart unmatched, adored of men
> Until Spring's cuckoo with bedraggled plumes
> Tempted her pity and her truth betrayed.
> Then she who shone for all resigned her being,
> And this must be a night without a moon.

These lines, given to Orpheus in Graves's novel *The Golden Fleece*[46], are charged with emotion, yet the lack of hyperbole combines with a controlled rhythmic balance to achieve self-possession and philosophical calm.

'A Love Story', another of the retrospective poems about Riding, describes a dramatic, threatening landscape which enchants the poet with its 'solemnities not easy to withstand'. Bewitched by

'the full moon' in its mid-winter setting he 'fetched it home', falling in love with 'her image' and making a 'lodgement of love on those chill ramparts'. It then seemed to him, in the 'new spring' of their love, that the 'snows melted, Hedges sprouted', and the moon 'tenderly shone' where before she had been 'furious' in 'a wintry sky ragged with red'. This was a false spring, however, an illusion for the reality of 'famine unassuaged' which was the true nature of her love:

> Dangerous it had been with love-notes
> To serenade Queen Famine.
> In tears I recomposed the former scene,
> Let the snow lie, watched the moon rise, suffered the owls,
> Paid homage to them of unevent.

Release from Riding's tyranny produced an exhilarating sense of liberation and 'awakening' in poems such as 'Dawn Bombardment' and 'Mid-Winter Waking', as well as an outburst of creative productivity. It was this experience of surviving extreme danger and 'near death', to awake and know oneself 'once more a poet', with one's artistic powers heightened and charged with energy, which led Graves inexorably towards the aesthetic of *The White Goddess*. It was an experience he wished to repeat, and despite welcoming 'unevent' for the time being, he would not be content to celebrate or 'pay homage' to it for long. 'Tranquility is of no poetical use'[47]; 'unevent' inevitably leads to the poet's drying up, which was always Graves's overriding fear.

With Riding, Graves accepted that the world he lived in had effectively come to an end, yet even then he had believed there was one thing which continued to be alive and to give life. 'End of Play', an ostensibly 'orthodox' poem within Riding's 'unique premiss' that 'historic Time had effectively come to an end', concludes:

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

Love survives death, even the death of history itself, but only if it is pure love, purged of its 'cynicism and foulness' which had blighted Graves's earlier affairs:

> No more shall love in hypocritic pomp
> Conduct its innocents through a dawn of shame,
> From timid touching of gloved fingers
> To frantic laceration of naked breasts.

Lust is similarly condemned and overcome in 'The Beast', published in *Poems 1938-1945*. Here two lovers are 'drawn by despair' to satisfy their lusts on each other, only to end their coupling in mutual disgust at their own and each other's gross appetites:

> Before the meal was over [we] sat apart
> Loathing each other's carrion company.

The new love celebrated in this volume is neither 'timid' or 'frantic'; it is not the saccharined 'blind innocence' of the post-war love poetry nor the merely sexual gratification of 'The Thieves' or 'The Beast'. In a playful poem, 'Despite and Still', the poet accepts love in its various aspects, achieving a compatibility between love and sexuality which gives these later love poems a greater resonance than those of his youth which had combined an idealised emotionalism with a denial of the physical:

> Never let us deny
> The Thing's necessity,
> But, O, refuse
> To choose
> Where chance may seem to give
> Loves in alternative.

Combined with the new mature realism in these poems is an unexpected tenderness; during the Riding years Graves had acquired - or rather, pursued - a hard-edged objectivity which at times strayed into the cynicism of 'Never Such Love'. At no point during those years could he have achieved the unconscious purity of emotion or the gentle intimacy of 'She Tells Her Love While Half Asleep'. This is another of the poems from *The Golden Fleece*, being Orpheus's song for 'Little Ancaeus' which was 'of such piercing sweetness that he could not restrain his tears'[48]. It is one of Graves's simplest and shortest lyrics, whose

concision and neatness is all the more remarkable for the atmosphere of leisurely timelessness it creates:

> She tells her love while half asleep,
> In the dark hours,
> With half-words whispered low:
> As Earth stirs in her winter sleep
> And puts out grass and flowers
> Despite the snow,
> Despite the falling snow.

The perfection of the lyric gives credence to the emotional harmony it portrays, as in 'Mid-Winter Waking' and 'Through Nightmare'. Yet all three of these poems, which are among Graves's best, depend for their harmony on the self-sufficiency of the lovers in isolation from the world. In 'She Tells Her Love' and 'Mid-Winter Waking' the natural world is hostile in its most wintry aspect, but although the countryside is deep in snow the lovers are indoors and their love for each other allows them to ignore, or defy, the inhospitable environment surrounding them:

> Be witness that on waking, this mid-winter,
> I found her hand in mine laid closely
> Who shall watch out the Spring with me.
> We stared in silence all around us
> But found no winter anywhere to see.

This wilful denial of sense experience is most pronounced in 'Through Nightmare', one of Graves's most accomplished love

poems, in which the poet gives advice to his beloved in the same protective tone he used in giving similar advice to his daughters in 'At the Savoy Chapel' and 'To Lucia at Birth'. It is a poem about self-watchfulness and self-preservation in a hostile world, and urges that independence from 'history' which has been his goal since surviving the war. 'To be in the world but not of it'[49], to be more than the 'mere servant of civilization', was Graves's overriding ambition and here it is seen as genuinely attainable, not through politics, or a pseudo-religious cult of 'hyper-moral' literary action as proposed by Riding, but by love and the powers of poetic imagination:

> The untameable, the live, the gentle.
> Have you not known them? Whom? They carry
> Time looped so river-wise about their house
> There's no way in by history's road
> To name or number them.
>
> In your sleepy eyes I read the journey
> Of which disjointedly you tell; which stirs
> My loving admiration, that you should travel
> Through nightmare to a lost and moated land,
> Who are timorous by nature.

'Untameable', alive and 'gentle' characterise the lovers in these post-Riding poems, and it is through their love that they are able to resist the encroachment of the political, social world of contemporary civilization into the private domain of the

individual. However, the 'lost and moated land' which exists 'beyond event' and free from historical time is a 'dream' world, which can only be visited 'sometimes' and 'seldom', and is only reached by a 'journey' 'through nightmare'. It is a temporary, momentary Eden achieved not through action but the inaction of thought and dream and suggests a belief in mysticism as a means of achieving personal self-sufficiency and contact with the subconscious self.

Graves's creative techniques had, since he described the 'poetic trance' in *On English Poetry*, always contained a parallel with mysticism, and there is no doubt that his own 'lost and moated land' is what he described as the poetic trance. In later accounts of this trance, he emphasised the fact that for the result to be 'truthful' the poet must have no other motive than 'self-illumination'[50]. How to retain the facility for entering this 'natural poetic trance' and achieving the 'illumination' which is 'the poet's paradise'[51] without going through the nightmare of war or emotional trauma, exercised him greatly over the next thirty years and was the ultimate aim of all later strategies, such as his romantic attachment to a series of 'personal muses', his investigations into hallucinogenic drugs[52] and his enthusiastic embrace of Sufism, a mystic branch of Islam. Graves's fear of 'poetic bankruptcy'[53], or becoming 'a dull and easy writer'[54] apparently made him prepared to risk almost anything to preserve his source of inspiration, including in the twenties his sanity, and

in the sixties his domestic happiness. The trauma of the war and the later emotional and intellectual turmoil of his relationship with Riding, both encouraged his superstitious belief that his poetry depended on personal suffering. In the Introduction to *Collected Poems 1938* he declared that his 'health as a poet lies in... mistrust of the comfortable point-of-rest':

> Certainly this suspicious habit, this dwelling upon discomfort and terror, has brought me good luck: for in the midst of my obstinate stumblings there have come sudden flashes of grace and knowledge.[55]

This passage reveals why silence was not considered an option by Graves: without the 'obstinate stumblings' there would be no chance of 'sudden flashes of grace and knowledge'.

Conclusion

Graves's belief that poetry was created out of an attempt to resolve emotional and psychological conflicts in the poet's mind, and his emphasis on 'hyper-moral' 'poetic integrity' as a response to a morally confused, 'non-poetic' world, led to a poetry that was introspective, while his idiosyncratic view of modernism, his rejection of stylistic experiment and 'verse fashions'[56], his avoidance of topical issues and denial of political commitment,

define his limitations as a 'representative spokesman'[57] of his age. Such spokesmanship was the ideal vision of the poet set out in 1925 in *Poetic Unreason*, in which Graves declared that the poet should stand 'in the middle of the larger society to which he belongs and reconcile in his poetry the conflicting views of every group, trade, class and interest in that society'[58]. This thesis has argued that soon after coming under the influence of Laura Riding, Graves rejected this as an ideal and instead turned his back on, or tried to turn his back on, the society to which he belonged. His aim then became to be a spokesman for no one but himself. The thesis further argues that this was not simply a response to the ideas of Laura Riding, but was the natural reaction of an alienated state of mind produced by traumatic experiences in the First World War.

Graves came of age as a poet in the First World War, and this thesis has argued that his poetic output after that war was permanently affected by the formative experience of the trenches. He was physically, emotionally and psychologically damaged by the war, but his poetic record of survival, personal reconstruction and difficult adaptation to post-war society, is an eloquent epilogue to the literature of the war, and increases our understanding of it. After the war Graves no longer wrote to persuade his readers to adopt a particular political viewpoint, nor did he seek to prevent further war or change the world. Like the 'poet' in 'The Fallen Tower of Siloam', his instinct in a world

which seemed to him to be morally on the point of collapse, was for personal survival. This itself is part of the damaging legacy he brought with him from the trenches, for it is ultimately a limiting element in his poetry. However, his view of poetry as a way of pursuing a moral idealism, a quasi-religious seeking of truth, and his 'struggle' to 'become a poet in more than the literary sense', imbue his writing with a sense of personal commitment and a strength and unity of vision which rescue it from mere subjectivity. If the poet makes 'self-illumination' the sole criterion for measuring a poem's success, he evades the censure of criticism: only he is in a position to judge if it has been effective or not, and it matters little how it reads to others. This was clearly not Graves's intention. His concern for the craft of poetry, for precision and clarity in a poem's meaning, and for revising and perfecting his personal canon, show he was far from indifferent to the effect his poems might have on potential readers. He believed that if a poem was 'truthful' and had 'integrity', then it would 'hypnotize readers who are faced by similar troubles into sharing the poet's emotional experience'[59], and that therein lay the value of his poetry to others. Again, this is a criterion for valuing a poem which, if accepted on its own terms, would make objective criticism impossible. This thesis has argued that Graves's ideas on the source of poetic inspiration, and on the moral and spiritual purpose of poetry, were important for defining the nature of the poetry he wrote, but it has resisted his claim that they should also define the way that poetry is read.

NOTES

1. RPG-2, p. 85.

2. *Ibid*, p. 344.

3. RPG first heard the story of the 'cautious' suicide attempt from Lady Liddell Hart (as for note 2 above). The suggestion that Graves was trying to reach Riding by the quickest means possible was made to me by Beryl Graves after publication of RPG-2 in 1990.

4. RPG-2, p. 85.

5. In O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 16 June 1929, pp. 188-190, letters to Gertrude Stein 18 June 1929 and No Date [June-July 1929] pp. 191-193.

6. Frank O'Connor, *My Father's Son* (Macmillan, 1968).

7. Letter from T. E. Lawrence to Mrs George Bernard Shaw 22 May 1929, quoted in MS-S, pp. 166-167.

8. 'Obsession', in *Experts are Puzzled* (Cape, 1930), p. 101.

9. Graves's description of her in 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding', GTAT29, p. 443.

10. Wexler, p. 54.

11. O'PREY-1, letter to Marsh 7 August 1916, pp. 58-59, and letter to Sassoon 31 May 1922, p. 134.

12. From 'A Letter from Wales'.

13. GTAT29, p. 439.

14. *Ibid.*

15. O'PREY-1, letter to Stein 18 June 1929, p. 191: 'I am busy when not in hospital in writing my autobiography. It is a sort of goodbye to everyone but the very very few people to whom one never says goodbye or has ever said a formal how do you do. Quite ruthless; yet without indignation'.

16. This is according to Riding's fictional description in *14(A)*, a novel she wrote with George Ellidge (Arthur Barker, 1934, p. 137.

17. GTAT29, p. 443.

18. GTAT29, p. 437.

19. 'Dedicatory Epilogue to Laura Riding', GTAT29, p. 443.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Riding, *Poems, A Joking Word* (Cape, 1930), p. 19.

22. *The Greek Myths* vol. 1, p. 80.

23. GTAT29, p. 443.

24. Riding, 'The Damned Thing' in *Anarchism is Not Enough* (Cape, 1928), p. 208.

25. Riding's personal statement in *Authors Today and Yesterday* (New York: Wilson, 1933), p. 565.

26. See RPG-2, p. 255.

27. Riding, *Anarchism is Not Enough*, p. 193.

28. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 175-176: 'The qualities that make a poem durable are no mystery. If a practising poet revises the canon of his poems every few years, passages of time will help him to recognize the derivative, the over-clever, the flawed, the repetitious, the didactic, the irrelevant. Durability implies that a poem was written for the right reasons, at the right time, and in the right state of mind.'

29. Riding and Graves, *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*, p. 163.

30. T. S. Matthews, *Jacks or Better: Recollections of Robert Graves, Laura Riding and Friends* (New York: Harper and Harper, 1977); as *Under the Influence* (London: Cassell, 1979), p. 130.

31. *Ibid*, p. 134.

32. *Ibid*, pp. 129-130.

33. *Ibid*, p. 129.

34. MS-S, pp. 236-237.

35. *Ibid*, p. 237: 'Fundamentally she did object, as she was later to tell him, to his poems "about himself"'.

36. Riding, 'Preliminaries', *Epilogue I*, Autumn 1935 (Mallorca: Seizin Press and London: Constable, 1935), p. 2.

37. *Ibid.*

38. RG, 'Why I live in Majorca', in *Majorca Observed*, p. 8.

39. Matthews, p. 134.

40. RPG-2, p. 303.

41. RPG-2, p. 310. Richard Graves bases his statement on a letter of Graves to Beryl Graves, 25 September 1939.

42. O'PREY-1, p. 292, letter to Liddell Hart 19 February 1940.

43. RG's diary, kept from February 1935 to May 1939, is in the Special Collection of the Library of the University of Victoria, British Columbia. I have studied a copy of this diary among Graves's papers in Deià.

44. *The Malahat Review* No. 35, July 1975 (Victoria: University of Victoria, British Columbia). The special edition, entitled 'A Gathering in Celebration of the Eightieth Birthday of Robert Graves', is edited by Robin Skelton and William Thomas.

45. MS-S, p. 332.

46. RG, *The Golden Fleece*, p. 279.

47. Graves's comment in 'The *Paris Review* Interview' in *Writers at Work*, p. 50.

48. *The Golden Fleece*, p. 126.

49. RG, 'Introduction' to Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, p. x.

50. *Poetic Craft and Principle*, p. 176.

51. *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*, p. 129.

52. See note 50 in the previous chapter. Graves's interest in the use of hallucinogens in writing was discussed by the present author in 'Without Walls', a Channel 4 Television documentary, broadcast in February 1993.

53. *The Crowning Privilege*, p. 150.

54. GTAT29, p. 381.

55. *Collected Poems 1938*, p. xxiv.

56. *The Crowning Privilege*, p. 135.

57. *Poetic Unreason*, p. 82.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Mammon and the Black Goddess*, p. 43.

APPENDIX 1

Facsimiles of worksheets of 'The Cuirassiers of the Frontier', from originals now in the possession of the State University of New York at Buffalo.

The four drafts here reproduced are arranged in reverse sequence of what I propose is the order of composition, as discussed on pages 115-120. Seven worksheets of this poem exist, showing the progress of its creation through four separate drafts. Two are holograph drafts, and there are two heavily annotated typescripts; in addition there is one holograph page containing a draft of the final verse, which I propose is part of the fourth draft. The original holograph manuscripts are written in black ink on foolscap paper, which has been here reduced by 15% in order to fit onto an A4 sheet.

Typescript: this is the fourth and final of the drafts extant. The fourth verse of the typescript is struck through. There are a number of phrases written in the margin which do not form a coherent alternative to the verse, and only the bottom phrase was used, in a slightly modified form, in the final version as published: 'The ageing tree lives only in its rind'. This is transposed above the final line of the typed verse, with 'rotten' instead of 'ageing'. Graves kept this amendment, as well as the amended fifth and sixth lines, though the fact that after making these amendments the whole verse is struck through suggests he wished to draft an entirely new version, incorporating the first, fifth, sixth and seven lines as corrected. There is a manuscript draft of this final verse on its own, on a separate sheet of paper, in a form which closely resembles the published version; it would seem likely that this single sheet belongs with the typescript fourth draft as a replacement to the rejected fourth verse.
The first two verses here appear exactly as published. In the third verse the published version has 'guard' instead of 'soldiers' in the second line, though the rest of the verse is unchanged. The holograph manuscript of the final verse is exactly as published.

Cuirassiers of the Frontier

The ~~Cataphracts~~

Goths, Vandals, Huns, Isaurian mountaineers,
Made Roman by our Roman sacrament,
We can know little (as we care little)
Of the Metropolis: her candled churches,
Her white-gowned pederastic senators,
The cut-throat factions of her Hippodrome,
The eunuchs of her draped saloons.

Here is the frontier, here our camp and place
~~Ourselves first, and our comrades of the troop,~~
Beans for the pot, fodder for horses,
And Roman arms. Enough. He who among us
At full gallop, the bowstring to his ear,
Lets drive his heavy arrows, to sink
Stinging through Persian corslets damascened,
Then follows with the lance — he has our love.

The Christ bade Holy Peter sheathe his sword,
Being outnumbered by the Temple soldiers.
And this was prudence, the cause not yet lost
While Peter might persuade the crowd to rescue.
Peter reneged, breaking his sacrament.
With us the penalty is death by stoning,
Not to be made a bishop.

In Peter's Church there is no faith nor truth
Nor ever was, nor honour in the streets;
Nor justice ~~anywhere in court or palace~~ anywhere in palace or tower.
~~That we continue faithful on the frontier~~
Are faithful in the Emperor's service
~~Concerns~~
~~Shut in the Christian Castle of Repentance~~
Leaped from its towers in tattered pride.

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In Peter's Church there is no faith nor truth,

Nor justice anywhere in palace or court.

That we ~~are faithful in the Emperor's service~~ continue watchful ~~at our post on these~~ on the ramparts walls

Concerns no ~~pilot~~ priest. ~~The~~ A gaping silken dragon,

Puffed by the wind, suffices us for God.

~~We are the Empire not Byzantium~~

We, not the ~~people~~ City, are the Empire's soul:

A rotten tree lives only in its rind.

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Typescript: This is what I propose is the third draft of those extant. The first three verses differ only slightly from the published version, but that Graves was finding the fourth verse problematic is clear by the heavy annotation of a typed draft. The first, third and fourth lines were retained in a slightly modified form, though what had earlier been established as the final image, the suicide of the 'three-obol whores', is here shown as rejected.

THE CATAPHRACTS

Goths, Vandals, Huns, Isaurian mountaineers
Made Roman by our Roman sacrament,
We can know little (as we care little)
Of the Metropolis: her candled churches,
Her white-gowned pederastic senators,
The cut-throat factions of her Hippodrome,
The eunuchs of her draped saloons.

Ourselves first, and our comrades of the troop,
Beans for the pot, fodder for horses,
And Roman arms. Enough. He who among us
At full gallop, the bowstring to his ear,
Lets drive his heavy arrows, which sink
Stinging through Persian corslets damascened,
Then follows with the lance — he has our love.

The Christ bade Peter sheathe his sword,
Being outnumbered by the Temple soldiers.
And this was prudence, the cause not yet lost
(While Peter might persuade the crowd to rescue.)
Peter reneged, breaking his sacrament.
With us the penalty is death by stoning,
Not to be made a bishop.

In Peter's Church there is no faith nor truth,
Nor ever did; nor honour in the streets;
Nor justice anywhere in court or palace.
That we continue faithful on the frontier
Concerns ourselves alone. So the poor whores
Confined in the Christian Castle of Repentance
Leaped from its towers in tattered pride.

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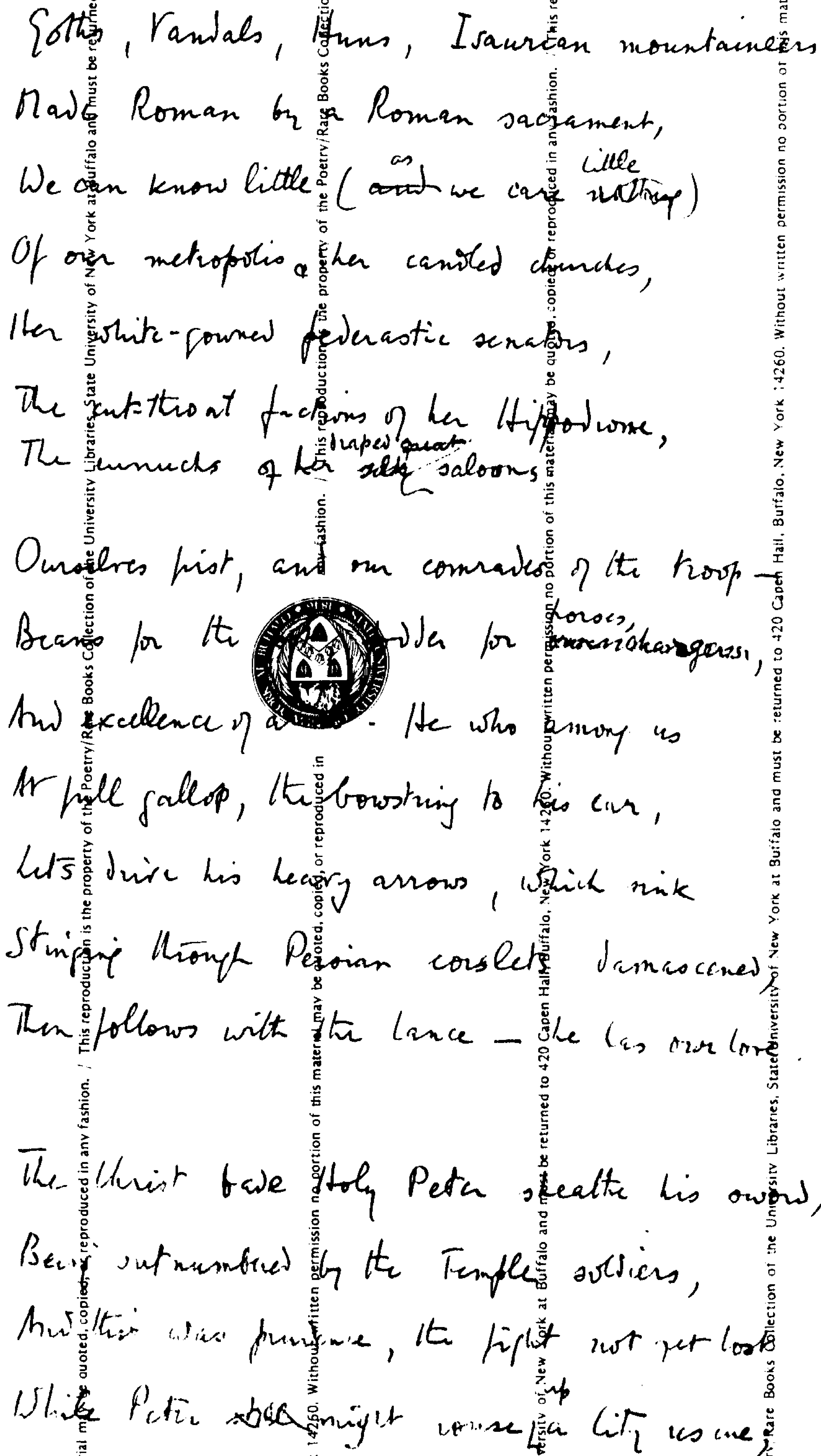
Second holograph draft.



The Cataphracts

Goths, Vandals, Huns, Isaurian mountaineers
Made Roman by a Roman sacrament,
We can know little (as we care little)
Of our metropolis, her candled churches,
Her white-gowned pederastic senators,
The cut-throat factions of her Hippodrome,
The eunuchs of her draped saloons.

Ourselves first, and our comrades of the troop —
Beans for the [illegible] fodder for horses,
And excellence of a[illegible] — He who among us
At full gallop, the bowstring to his ear,
Lets drive his heavy arrows, which sink
Stinging through Persian corslets damascened,
Then follows with the lance — he has our love.

The Christ bade Holy Peter sheathe his sword,
Being outnumbered by the Temple soldiers,
And this was prudence, the fight not yet lost
While Peter might rouse up a city rescue,

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But ~~Holy~~ Peter ~~broke his~~ failed, and breaking his sacrament.
With us the penalty is death by stoning,
~~And must to be made [illegible] must~~ [illegible] done.

There is no faith nor truth ~~in the~~ here [illegible]

Nor ever was, nor honour in the ~~people~~ square street,

Nor justice (anywhere in ~~the palace~~ for court or palace

~~While~~ That we continue faithful on the frontier

~~That is our jest~~ Conscious no one only. To the three old shores

Shut in the Sacred Castle of Repentance

Leaped from the towers in ~~primitive~~ absurd pride.

[illegible] space

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First holograph draft.

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~~Caring nothing if we are true soldiers~~
~~For the home altars smoking and the bustle~~
~~Of the white-gowned non-combatants.~~
~~Men, women children in the public square~~

The Cataphracts

Ourselves first and our comrades, of the troop —
Beans for the pot, fodder for our chargers,
Goths, Vandals, Huns, Isaurian mountaineers
Made by the Roman sacrament
We can know little (and we care nothing)
Of our [illegible] her candled churches

[illegible] pederast senators or delicate writers
~~[illegible] and academies and factions~~
The factions of the Hippodrome
the cutthroat

And excellence of arms. He who among us
At full gallop, the bowstring to his ear,
Lets drive his heavy arrows, which stinging
Through Persian corslets damascened,
Then follows with the lance: he has our love.

The Christ bade Holy Peter sheathe his sword
~~And this he did, [illegible]. The [illegible]~~ sword forward
[illegible] standard

by the [illegible] people
his
[illegible] Thus wrong prudence: hopeless
Being outnumbered, but counted on his skill later
dart might strike [illegible] the light [illegible] rescue
[illegible] ahead [illegible] Rescue in [illegible] city
For Peter should [illegible] away and rouse the people
Rather But Peter [illegible] broke his [illegible] accident.
But Peter [illegible] coward [illegible] denied [illegible] the Church.
This is no faith nor truth in the priestly church
Nor ever was, nor
Nor honour in the people or [illegible] courts.
Nor justice in the Palace, and [illegible]
that we are [illegible] in
And why we guard the frontiers, [illegible] written
Ourselves [illegible] so the three-cornered shores
[illegible] sacred)
[illegible] in [illegible]
[illegible] the Lasting Repentance
Leaps from the walls (in primitive pride.
[illegible] together

have you not heard how

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APPENDIX 2

Facsimile worksheet of 'To Whom Else?' from an original now in the possession of the State University of New York at Buffalo.

This is the eighth holograph draft in a series of nine extant. It shows corrections in Laura Riding's hand as discussed on pages 384 - 387.

The first verse is the same as the published version, except that in the fifth line 'idle', here crossed out and replaced by 'vain, is reinstated. The second verse is exactly as published, showing Graves accepting Riding's suggested amendments. The third verse on the second sheet is omitted entirely from the poem as published. In the final verse, the first three lines accord exactly with the published version, including Riding's amendments. The final three lines in the published poem are formed by rearranging the same words in this draft:

> Thankfully I consent
> To my estrangement
> From me in you.

To Whom Else

25

To whom else other than,
To whom else not of man
Yet in human state,
Standing neither in stead
Of self nor idle godhead,
a vain man in man ended
Should I,
Myself dedicate?

To whom else momently,
To whom else endlessly,
But to you?
To you who only,
To you who mercilessly,
Plucked out the lie?

To you who lovingly,

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24

Space)

To whom else free of ~~[struck]~~ wish

To whom else ~~[struck]~~,

Beyond love, true?

My body's action,

~~My mind's~~ correction,

~~My being's~~ satisfaction;

I to you.

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(space)

To whom else ~~more unlikely~~ less acquaint(ed)

To whom else ~~more~~ ~~immediate~~ without taint

Of ~~time~~, ~~time-true~~, ~~keystone~~ death-true

~~Never until now, today~~

~~Nor Never~~ even after ~~now~~,

~~Never again~~

~~Do but assent~~ I do consent

To you ~~great~~ excellence

~~who not wonder~~

now
I do consent
With great
astonishment
To this estrangement
Of me in you

~~half my compliment~~ With great contentment
~~to take in payment~~ all
~~I am bent~~
~~To my joy and content~~
~~Wholly~~
To ~~of you~~ ~~With timid~~ ~~Affair~~
At this estrangement
~~Of them from your~~
~~from myself~~ me in
Of me by you.

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