ROBERT GRAVES: THE MAKING OF A POET.

A study of the development of the poetry of Robert Graves, 1914 - 1938 - with special reference to his poetic theory and practice, and to some of his characteristic themes.

C O N T E N T S

Throughout the notes and in Appendix One the following abbreviations are used for the titles of works by Graves.

AHH: Ann at Highwood Hall.
CP 38: Collected Poems 1938.
CP 47: Collected Poems 1914-1947.
CP 55: Collected Poems 1955.
CP 59: Collected Poems 1959.
CP 61: Collected Poems 1961.
CP 65: Collected Poems 1965.
CP 66: Collected Poems 1966.
CP 75: Collected Poems 1975.
CS: Country Sentiment.
FB: The Feather Bed.
FC: Food for Centaurs.
FF: Fairies and Fusiliers.
5PH: Five Pens in Hand.
GBTAT: Goodbye To All That.
GD: Goliath and David.
MBH: Mock Beggar Hall.
MDC: The More Deserving Cases.
MDWI: Man Does, Woman Is.
MM: The Marmosite's Miscellany.
MP 61: More Poems 1961.
NMG: No More Ghosts.
OB (1916): Over the Brazier (1916).
OB (1920): Over the Brazier (1920).
P 1914-1926: Poems 1914-1926.
P 1914-1927: Poems 1914-1927.
P 1929: Poems 1929.
P 1926-1930: Poems 1926-1930.
P 1930-1933: Poems 1930-1933.
P 1953: Poems 1953.
PAL: Poems About Love.
PF: The Penny Fiddle.
PG: The Pier-Glass.

PRG: The Poems of Robert Graves.

PS: Poems and Satires.

PSH 57; PSH 61; PSH 66; PSH 72: Poems selected by himself 1957; 1961; 1966; 1972.

S: Steps.

SPP: Selected Poetry and Prose.

TB: The Treasure Box.

TPM: Ten Poems More.

TWE? : To Whom Else?

W: Whipperginny.

WH: Welchman's Hose.

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ABSTRACT

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ROBERT GRAVES: THE MAKING OF A POET
A study of the development of the poetry of Robert Graves, 1914-1938 - with special reference to his poetic theory and practice, and to some of his characteristic themes.

by William Barry Sloan

This thesis examines the poetic and critical writings of Robert Graves between 1914 and 1938 in an attempt to establish the stages in his theory and practice, and to suggest some of his main themes. The introduction surveys early criticism of Graves's poetry, indicating the qualities for which he was praised and blamed. The relevance of these judgments is discussed further in the central chapters.

The first chapter uses examples of Graves's poetry to illustrate his poetic evolution. The poems are also viewed in relation to the critical and theoretical works of Graves and Laura Riding, and the relationship between theory and practice is discussed. The connections between the poetry Graves was writing and the beliefs he held at various times, and events in his personal life, are substantiated by references to his biography. Emphasis is given throughout to aspects of his work which seem to anticipate The White Goddess (1949). In this context, particular consideration is given to Laura Riding's beliefs, and their influence on Graves.

The second chapter traces four recurrent themes in Graves's work and extends the argument of the first chapter by further instancing links between the poet's personal life, his thematic preoccupations and his poetic theory. The continuity in Graves's themes before and after 1938 is also indicated.

The conclusion makes an assessment of the strengths, weaknesses and range of Graves's poetry of the period, and compares his development between 1914 and 1938 with his subsequent career.

There are two appendices. The first is a checklist of collections in which poems published within the period studied have since reappeared, and also records where revisions were made to them. The second appendix corrects a number of errors established in works about Graves.

Poetry is the profession of private truth, supported by craftsmanship in the use of words.
Robert Graves: Poetic Craft and Principle

We make out of our quarrel with others, rhetoric; but of our quarrel with ourselves, poetry.
W.B. Yeats: Mythologies

Introduction.

A Review of Contemporary Opinion on the Poetry of Robert Graves between 1914 and 1938.

Robert Graves first made his mark as a soldier poet of the First World War. Over the Brazier was welcomed by Edmund Gosse for 'the elated vivacity' of the verse, 'which neither fire, nor pain, nor grief can long subdue'.[1] Gosse went on to cite 'The Dead Fox Hunter' as 'a gallant poem which Englishmen will not allow to be forgotten'. Thus, from the outset, Graves gained recognition as a writer worthy of attention, though the aspects of his work praised by his earliest reviewers often tend, in retrospect, to seem to us the least attractive. For instance, quoting 'A Dead Boche', Conrad Aiken said:

> certainly these are among the most honest and vivid war poems which so far have come to us - and if Mr. Graves does not cut very deep, neither, on the other hand, does he go in for the usual mock-heroics and sentimental buncombe.[2]

'A Dead Boche' was probably Graves's most serious effort to deal directly with the horrors of war, but it is only a cry of genuine anguish and has nothing in common with, say, the honesty of the major poems of Wilfred Owen.[3] It is untrue to maintain that in Fairies and Fusiliers Graves did not go in for 'the usual mock-heroics and sentimental buncombe'. On the contrary, poems such as 'To Lucasta' - described by one reviewer as conveying 'the essence of the regimental spirit'[4] - , 'Not Dead', or 'Two Fusiliers' seem typical of the cliché-ridden and sentimental excesses of so much First World War verse. The critic in Carthusian who signed himself G.M. - and may have been Graves's former teacher and friend, George Mallory - suggested that the success of the poems in Fairies and Fusiliers consisted in the way that they are 'so beautifully digestible'.[5] This revealing phrase indicates a particular attitude to poetry, implying that the reviewer expected to be soothed rather than stimulated, graciously and quietly humoured rather than confronted with bold imaginative truth. It is a viewpoint which the work of critics as varied as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, F.R. Leavis and Graves himself has rendered unfashionable, but it helps to explain the expectations of the literary world in which the young poet began writing. There is no doubt that at one stage Graves was prepared to respond to these expectations, as his poem 'To an Ungentle Critic'

1. Edmund Gosse, Edinburgh Review, 226 (Oct.1917),296-316.
2. Conrad Aiken, The Dial, 65 (19 Sept. 1918), 214-15.
3. This point is amplified in Chapter One, pp.30-3.
4. G.M., Carthusian, 12 (March 1918), 181.
5. Ibid.

makes plain. Here he appears to anticipate the reactions of those who, like Pound or Eliot (whose Prufrock and Other Observations was also published in 1917), might challenge his conservative style and themes:

> ... I shall scrawl
> Just what I fancy as I strike it,
> Fairies and Fusiliers, and all.
> Old broken knock-kneed thought will crawl
> Across my verse in the classic way.
> And, sir, be careful what you say;
> There are old-fashioned folk still like it.[6]

It is curious that while Graves was writing in this vein, Gosse held him up as an example of 'extreme modernness', whose attitude that'"Life is a cliché - I would find a gesture of my own"' was evidence of his vitality.[7] Yet within ten years Graves was contemptuous of his early reactions and of the poems which embodied them, although in his determination to pursue his own course his generally defiant approach remained unchanged.

The publication of Country Sentiment (1920)was hailed with even greater enthusiasm and reviews more detailed than Graves had previously received. His attempts to adopt the rhythms and style of nursery poetry and of ballads attracted particular attention, and 'Allie', 'The Haunted House' (then called 'Ghost Raddled'), 'Outlaws', and 'the whimsical beauty' of 'Vain and Careless', all drew their share of praise. An anonymous reviewer in Crescent observed that

> Simplicity is the foundation of the whole fabric... Mr. Graves's study of Nursery Rhymes has given all his work the directness, which is their characteristic as well as his. He calls a spade a spade, and not like Sassoon "a- -shovel".[8]

Similarly, Mark van Doren, reviewing the American edition, said:

> Mr. Graves writes nursery rhymes for the young and ballads for the old with equal simplicity and gusto.[9]

One critic, however, made a more guarded and ultimately more perceptive comment. Writing in The Athenaeum, Middleton Murry at once seized

6. FF (1917), pp.1-2.
7. Gosse, Edinburgh Review, 226 (Oct. 1917), 296-316.
8. Anon., Crescent, 1 (June 1920), 29.
9. Mark van Doren, The Nation (New York), 3, No.2884 (13 Oct.1920), 414-15.

on the weaknesses of Graves's position and the limitations of what he was trying to do.[10] Examining the poet's gross over-simplifications and his uncritical belief in the superiority of nursery rhymes to any other kind of poetry - this claim is made particularly in 'To E.M. - Ballad of a Nursery Rhyme' [11] - he concludes that Graves

> merely means that he does not like serious poetry; but he does like nursery rhymes...Mr. Graves, we think, suffers at present from not having realized that the province he has deliberately chosen for himself, though small, is very hard to subdue. It is not enough to be simple yourself in order to achieve simplicity.

Thus, so far as Murry is concerned, the least pretentious and ambitious poems are the most successful. He mentioned 'Advice to Lovers' as a 'charming' piece which, along with 'Pot and Kettle' and 'Sospan Fach', may earn the writer 'the congenial post of making our rhyme-books'. He will not, however, allow Graves the title of poet, or even poet in the making, conceding only that he has an 'indispensible...fineness of the moral fibre', and that 'at least... there is nothing essentially alien to poetry in him'.

It is particularly interesting that, as Murry sees it, Graves is least secure when he endeavours to use the ancient ballad-forms. Just as he points out the limitations of the nursery poems, he suggests that the poet, whether knowingly or not, underestimated the depth of experience that lies behind traditional ballads, and confused their apparent simplicity with mere simplification. Murry maintains that

> Behind a true ballad lies the grim wisdom of generations of hunted men who have snatched at life. They have mapped their universe, simply; but their knowledge is become an instinct: they carry in their minds, as on their bodies, nothing that can be spared; and their forgotten art is an art of essentials. Bigger men than Mr. Graves have failed in the effort to recapture it, and perhaps his failure is no worse than theirs; but it is irrevocable and absolute.

10. J.M. Murry, The Athenaeum, 94 (9 April 1920), 472-74.
11. CS (1920), pp.55-7

While the severe tone of these comments may be justified by poems like 'Dicky', 'After the Play' and possibly even 'A Frosty Night', one feels that Murry was perhaps unfair in issuing such a generalized condemnation. 'Apples and Water', 'Ghost Raddled' and 'Outlaws' all have discernible merits, even if they do not match 'the true ballad substance' in every way. Certainly we can now see that they are important poems in terms of the Graves canon. Murry's article ends with a warning which is valid in the context of Country Sentiment, for he questions whether Graves 'will achieve more permanent success in a higher kind than childish rhyme', and suggests that until the poet learns to exercise greater self-criticism in dealing with 'other emotions than the pleasant thrill of rhyming', he would not develop in any significant way. There are successes in Country Sentiment - perhaps more than Murry was ready to admit - but they are limited in their range of emotion and subject matter. Despite Murry's objections, the best poems, and the ones that Graves has chosen to retain (e.g. 'Allie', 'Vain and Careless', 'Ghost Raddled', 'Outlaws'), are based on ballad or nursery rhyme forms, and these served the poet well at this stage in his career just as on many subsequent occasions.

The poems published in The Pier-Glass, Graves's next collection, were for the most part sterner and more disturbing in tone and theme than the majority of pieces in Country Sentiment. The poet seemed to react against his previous attempts to escape into whimsy and childish fantasy, turning more often and more directly to a confrontation with his neurosis. Louis Golding was quick to notice this fact:

> in The Pier-Glass, the disillusionment of these years, the hollow boasts, the breaking of promises, have reacted upon him and been transmitted within him to a melancholy and a terror which find faultlessly their haunting and subtle rhythms. [12]

It is notable that Golding associates Graves's attitude with a general social phenomenon - the disappointment and feeling of futility and

12. Louis Golding, Voices, 5 (Summer 1921), p.91-2.

betrayal that developed soon after the end of the First World War. He seems to be more aware of this than of the poet's personal difficulties, and on the basis of such contemporary reaction one may speculate that, in however minor a way, Graves's private crisis reflected aspects of a widespread public dilemma. Golding referred specifically to the title poem, to 'The Gnat', and to 'Down' - which he described as 'the best poem in the collection' - all of which concern characters who are haunted and whose innocence has been destroyed. No mention is made of 'The Stake', perhaps the first poem in which Graves creates a wholly convincing image of harmonious new life springing from the buried evil of the past, nor of 'Return' where the internal debate between the parts of his divided personality concludes with a disciplined rejection of the effects of the 'seven years' curse'.

Poems like 'The Stake', 'Return', 'Down', and at least the first half of 'The Pier-Glass' are powerful and emotional expressions of stages in the writer's struggle with his neurasthenia, and it is surprising to read Mark van Doren's claim that

> We get the same dry satisfaction from watching the faculties of Mr. Graves and his kind (sic) work that Cowley's contemporaries got from watching his. When there is to be no passion or imagination, let there at least be ingenuity.[13]

As an example of Graves's 'ingenuity' and 'quaint, excessive persistence' he quotes 'The Gnat', and while one accepts the justice of his remark in the context of this poem, it does not seem typical of much that is best in the collection. Van Doren concludes that Graves 'is interesting. Probably he is far from being important just yet, but he is pretty sure to be watched'.

With the appearance of Whipperginny in 1923 Graves declared his indifference towards public opinion and his disinclination to try to gain an easy popularity. In his author's note he explained that the later poems are indicative of the greater emotional detachment and scepticism with which he now wished to replace his earlier conviction of the basic need for passionate involvement in his subject

13. Mark van Doren, The Nation (New York), 114, No.2949 (11 Jan.1922), 48-9.

matter. In retrospect, it seems likely that Whipperginny, miscellaneous and uneven as it is, marked an important stage in Graves's career. It can now be recognized both as a summary of his past work and attitudes and as a clear indication of the directions he was to follow in the next few years. Contemporary reviews reveal a degree of uncertainty among the critics. How were they meant to take this collection? To judge from their lack of interest in the author's note, they were reluctant to set much store by Graves's own testimony. Indeed, insofar as they expressed preferences for particular poems, there was a tendency to favour those works about which the poet himself seemed least enthusiastic. Lord David Cecil, for example, observed that

> The later poems in this volume, written under the influence of a psychoanalytic theory of verse, though not without that distinction which he cannot fail to convey, are restless, constricted, and ugly.[14]

J.C. Squire, writing in the London Mercury, accused Graves of thinking

> that no dream is too confused, no speculation too wild, no figurative thought too trivial to be set down in rhyme. He was not made, I think, to be a poet primarily intellectual or to ratiocinate too much about his own mental processes, and it will be a pity if a good poet gets buried under aimless philosophizings...It is no good trying to be a Blake if you are not born one, and it would be a thousand pities if Mr. Graves insisted on continuing his present attempts to be oracular and gnomic instead of allowing his native genius free scope.[15]

At the same time, Squire insists that the 'feeling and skill' in 'A Forced Music', 'Children of Darkness' and 'A Lover Since Childhood ' surpass those of any of his previous work. 'Children of Darkness' is the only one of these poems to be retained in recent collections, and it is also the only one of the three which clearly

14. Lord David Cecil, The Saturday Review, 135, (2 June 1923), 726.
15. J.C. Squire, London Mercury, 8 (June 1923), 206-07.

indicates the increased disillusionment and harshness which became a characterestic of Graves's verse in the 'twenties. It is notable that there is no reference to the witty and ironic structure of 'The Lord Chamberlain Tells of a Famous Meeting', or to the poet's keen sense of paradox in 'Song of Contrariety' or the title poem. Yet these devices of style - wit, irony and paradox - underlie many of the poems in Whipperginny and are symptomatic of the poet's changing attitude to life.

David Cecil and Mark van Doren agreed,however, that Graves was 'establishing himself', and Lord David acknowledged that the poet had

> left the ranks of the observers for those of the creators. His new book is not all equally good, but every poem, every line, one is tempted to say every word, breathes an individuality, separating it finally from the work of everyone else.

Graves, as has been said, drew attention to his new emotional detachment, and indicated that this was a basic change to be found in his more recent poems, and Cecil made the shrewd observation that he seemed 'too afraid that his emotion will melt into sentimentality to let it get white hot'. Consequently, 'he is never profoundly moving, and even at his best his poems lack the lyric onrush'. As a generalization, this is true of Whipperginny , and the point that Graves is in a sense afraid of emotion retains a certain validity throughout his work. The effects of this are discussed elsewhere, but it is a curious fact that despite his reputation as a love poet, Graves almost always seems afraid of intense emotion.[16] Thus, his characteristic attitude is ironic or somehow resigned to the inevitability of limited happiness and security. Common sense tells him that protest or complaint is futile and by temperament he would regard them as weak or unbecoming. Admirable as this self-possession may be from one point of view, it will be argued that it has often restricted the possible range of Graves's work.

16. This point is amplified in Chapter Two, pp.143-44, and the Conclusion p. 199.

His next four collections - The Feather Bed, Mock Beggar Hall, Welchman's Hose, and The Marmosite's Miscellany-attracted little attention, which is, perhaps, not surprising, because in them the poet appeared to be passing through a phase of uncertainty of aim and method. Reviewing The Feather Bed for The Nation and The Athenaeum, F.L. Lucas observed that

> The reader's main impression is of real talent-wasted. The situation is quite a good one; and the prologue, with its description of the lover losing himself in the mists on the mountain-side, is really vivid. But the body of the work raises in passage after passage the insistent question: "Why verse?" [17]

This is a fair comment, and the question becomes even more insistent in the case of Mock Beggar Hall, which is probably the least satisfactory collection of verse that Graves has ever published. In almost every case philosophy and theory are the motivating force, and the result is often an arid dialectical conflict written in lines of verse. Graves has retained very few examples from this period in his collections, most of the work being dropped as early as 1926. In the review already mentioned, F.L. Lucas concluded:

> Mr. Graves has here produced something rather interesting instead of something fine.

The interest of the work now lies in the way it illuminates the poet's state of mind and his artistic problems in the years immediately before he came under the influence of Laura Riding.

In publishing Poems 1914-1926 (1927), Graves was consciously marking the end of a phase of his development. It is, as it were, the poetic complement to the famous autobiography which appeared two years later, and like it prepares us for a new beginning in the writer's life. A review by Babette Deutsch exposes the gap which had opened between Graves and the literary establishment. We have seen some of the favourable comments bestowed upon his earliest work, and how the note of doubt and disapproval, first appearing with Country Sentiment, became more general with the publication of Whipperginny. Deutsch

17. F.L. Lucas, The Nation and The Athenaeum, 33 (15 Sept. 1923),749-50.

endorses this trend, commenting that

> There is a chasm between those endearingly melodious trivia and the angry irony and belligerent fuming of his latest period.[18]

The specific attributes of the early work which impressed her are those that earlier critics had also praised:

> What struck one in those first brief volumes was the sweet force of his lyric gift, which not even the grimmest experience could sour.

In the later verse Deutsch detects the influence of the American poet, John Crowe Ransom - to whom The Feather Bed was dedicated -, but is not inclined to regard this as beneficial. Graves, she feels, took over Ransom's 'metaphysical moralizings' and 'verbal involutions', but his work

> lacked the peculiar cadence, the individual use of feminine endings, the mouth-filling polysyllables, that are so intrinsic a part of Ransom's masterly verse.

Graves's basic problem, as Babette Deutsch understood it, was that he had undertaken to write poetry for 'the furtherance of wisdom', and that this purpose was alien to his gifts as a lyric poet and resulted only in 'learned groans'. The point is akin to that raised by F.L. Lucas in his review of The Feather Bed. Deutsch, however, realized that much as one might wish for Graves to 'return to his beginnings', such a course was 'manifestly impossible', and she concluded with the hope that the poet might

> yet discover how to combine intellection and its melancholies with his old verbal and musical felicities.

With hindsight, one can see that this was both a sympathetic and a constructive review, but one can also appreciate how the tenor of its comments - praise for the early work and serious doubts about the later writing - must have been particularly frustrating to Graves at the time. It must have helped to strengthen his increasing sense of alienation from

18. Babette Deutsch, The New Republic, 60 (23 Oct. 1929), 277-78.

the old-fashioned but persistent attitude that poetry should be pleasurable but not serious - the attitude to which, as was suggested, he himself had been an heir. When they were written, Deutsch's final words, however sound they may have been, can only have appeared typical of the lack of understanding and congenial company which Graves felt all around him in England in 1927.

Critical opinion was further divided by Poems 1929. An extreme reaction came from T.S. Matthews, writing in The New Republic, who was openly hostile:

> In these twenty-five poems, the product of the Graves and Riding Seizin Press, there may be health, but there is little sense... Either Graves has changed his opinion of what constitutes poetry, or he has lost sight of his readers from too much pondering in distorted mirrors.[19]

The reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement was more circumspect, but his basic criticism of the collection was similar to that of T.S. Matthews. He questioned Graves's ability to communicate his experiences successfully to the reader, and speculated that the 'most curious and recondite images' of poems such as 'Midway' were little more than ineffectual tricks aimed at

> carrying the reader rapidly across chasms of incomprehension... The extreme confidence with which Mr. Graves uses strange images may perhaps suggest that he is doubtful of their relevance; and certainly communicates at times such doubt to the reader.[20]

The reviewer attributed this impasse and the consequent obscurity to Graves having withdrawn into himself as a poet, and the implication is that we are being presented with private visions, indeed even hallucinations of the outside world. Thus, for example, while he accepts that a certain state of mind is reflected in 'Landscape', he blames Graves for failing to give us the necessary clues to know whether we are meant to believe in this state of mind and in the reality of what it sees. This apparent inability to accept or understand what

19. T.S. Matthews, The New Republic, 62 (19 Feb. 1930), 23-4.
20. Times Literary Supplement (5 Dec. 1929), 1029.

Graves was trying to do drew a caustic letter from Laura Riding, who commented that the reviewer seemed so engrossed with his own ideas of what poetry should be that he had no time to consider another point of view, and that his remarks were irrelevant as a result. 'One feels,' she wrote, 'that your reviewer is speaking from an absolute position; so that the centre of interest of the review is not Mr. Graves's work but this absolute position of the reviewer.' [21] Miss Riding's words seem justified, for had the reviewer been as willing to read Graves's poems with a sympathetic imagination as he was to pontificate on their alleged metaphysical inadequacies, his comments might have been more informative.

Not everyone was disposed to give a cold reception to Graves's work of the late 'twenties, and a notable exception was Richard Church, who reviewed Poems 1926-1930 for The Fortnightly Review. Far from being put off by the riddling verses, the satirical manner and the spare language, Church was full of enthusiasm for them:

> Every vigorous and creative mind has moods - often lasting over a period of years - of destructive mischief and rebellion... Mr. Graves is in such a mood. His technique and the beautiful idiosyncrasy of his art, make his expression of this mood very amusing and lively. He insists on treating human society as though every member of it is a tyrannic Swellfoot. [22]

He sees the poet's strengths as his 'directness of temper...combined with a mind of great subtlety, one capable of the most intricate intellectual administration'. It is, perhaps, difficult to agree that these virtues are most clearly displayed in 'In Broken Images', as Church asserts, for that poem, interesting though it maybe as a comment on Graves's own personality, is a strictly limited artifice. The remark might have been applied with greater justice to 'The Terraced Valley', 'Warning to Children', or 'Lost Acres'.

In a somewhat belated review of the 1938 Collected Poems, E.C.Pettet endorsed much of what Church had said ten years earlier, though he felt able to add that 'Poems 1926-1930 can now be seen in perspective as the decisive turning point in his (Graves's) development'. [23]

21. Laura Riding, Times Literary Supplement (26 Dec. 1929), 1097.
22. Richard Church, Fortnightly Review, 135 (26 March 1939), 419-20.
23. E.C. Pettet, English, 3, No. 17 (1941), 216-20.

He went on to explain the nature of this 'signal transformation':

> if his poetic consciousness is still focussed on the pain of life, he no longer attempts to rebel against that fact, to fling a veil of romance over it, or to dissolve it in some brain-spun metaphysical system. He nakedly accepts it (including his own weaknesses and limitations as a poet), recognizing that escape is impossible; and his acceptance gives his poetry a new strength, concentration, discipline, and even at times serenity. This is the spirit of 'Saint', 'Castle', 'Midway', 'O Love in Me', 'It Was All Very Tidy', and of 'Furious Voyage'.

Nor did Pettet see the importance of the volume only in terms of the writer's attitudes:

> No less decisive is the transformation of style apparent in Poems 1926-1930. For many years he had been moving steadily away from the rhymed decorative elegancies of the Georgian technique; but now for the first time the whole of his work becomes characteristically modern in its spareness, flexibility, and stripping away of all ornament to a precise concentrated statement. His diction keeps close to the idiom of ordinary speech, and, while making only a sparse use of the conventionally 'poetic' words rich in vague associations, is charged with original metaphor; his constructions, if sometimes compressed, are straightforward and avoid artificial inversions; his rhythms are subtle and alert, being based on a syllabic accentuation rather than the foot unit; and he is fond both of half-rhymes and unrhymed stanzas. Altogether his style has become a perfect garment for his experience.

In the earlier review, Richard Church, who was fascinated by the forceful impression he received of Graves's personal anguish, was also struck by the unusual skill and subtlety exercised in disciplining this suffering. He spoke of the 'sudden outleaping strength' of the best poems and although his analysis is not as detailed as E.C. Pettet's the phrase admirably summarizes the effect of the works mentioned above. There is no doubt that as Whipperginny launched Graves into one new

phase of his development, Poems 1926-1930 prepares the way for his writing in the 'thirties.

Although he published To Whom Else? in 1931 and Poems 1930-1933 (1933), it was not until the Collected Poems of 1938 that Graves received much further critical attention. The Collected Poems were divided into five sections which, according to the foreword, correspond to the stages in the writer's 'struggle to be a poet in more than a literary sense'.[24] One reviewer, however, J.G. Fletcher, concluded his remarks in the Kenyon Review by declaring that he was 'not disposed... to confer on Mr. Graves the title of poet'.[25] The grounds for this assertion were that Graves had submitted to 'false guides' of logic and reason, abandoning a Christian framework of reference and attempting 'to construct another, midway in his career'. This point of view is open to the same criticism as was made by Laura Riding of the Times Literary Supplement reviewer of Poems 1929 - namely, that Fletcher has adopted an absolute critical position which automatically invalidates other systems of thought. Graves spoke in his foreword to the Collected Poems of the large proportion of 'unpleasant' poems in the collection, but Fletcher considered the later works not so much unpleasant as abstract:

> Here we read, in poem after poem, of human pride, humility, love and friendship, warfare, lust, man and nature, the relation of things to time, procreation and parentage, and many other subjects, but all in abstract terms. The world these poems exist in is a world detached from the living, concrete, and whole.

By a curious twist in events, the quality J.G. Fletcher deplored as abstraction and detachment from the living world is one which other critics have found praiseworthy. Thus, Edwin Muir, in his review of the collection, wrote:

> He is not much concerned with the world as it exists, but with a world which can be created by taking thought, and very hard thought... I doubt the process and disagree with much of the thought; but they have certainly produced some

24. CP (1938), p.xiii.
25. J.G Fletcher, Kenyon Review, 2 (Winter 1940), 100-03 .

> poetry of a very rare and very high quality.[26]

More specifically, in an essay called 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake and Poetry beyond Poetry', Stephen Spender wrote:

> nothing happens, nothing is said, in Mr. Graves's poems except the poetry... [He] writes a kind of pure poetry which is so different from the search for the pure phrase, the pure line, the pure music of the French purists: it is the rather roughly hewn poetry of a purely poetic experience... Graves uses experience as an ore from which to extract poetry; many poets use poetry as a means of expressing their general deductions from experience.[27]

To illustrate his point by contrast, Spender suggests that where Graves's process is an 'extraction of poetry from life', that of T.S. Eliot in 'Little Gidding' is to make 'a judgment of life by poetry'. Donald Davie appears to have articulated a similar idea when he spoke of the 'toneless voice' of Robert Graves.[28] By this he means that in his best work Graves makes virtually no concession to the reader's existence. His attention does not deviate from the subject of the poem for he does not posture self-consciously before the reader. In this respect the poet's contemptuous dismissal of the reader over his shoulder, which seemed a 'spiritual aberration ' to Richard Church in 1929, has continued to be a controlling attitude throughout his mature work. Davie is probably correct when he says that there is no clearer indication of Graves's lack of interest in impressing or wooing an audience than the sound of him reading his work aloud, for the voice he adopts is flat and monotonous, and furnishes the reader with no clues to interpretation.

One other critic who has shown interest in the style of Graves's work is F.W. Bateson. In English Poetry and the English Language he has written that

> it is only very recently, in the work of writers like Wilfred Owen, Robert Graves, William Empson, and W.H. Auden, that a poetry has arisen which has been wholly divorced from

26. Edwin Muir, London Mercury, 39 (16 Dec. 1938), 215-16.
27. Stephen Spender, Horizon, 13, No. 76 (April 1946), 217-38.
28. Donald Davie, The Listener, (2 July 1959), 11-3.

> prose. This poetry has been labelled 'difficult'. It is possible, however, that much of its difficulty is due simply to its having discarded those prosaic elements which readers have been accustomed to expect in modern poetry.[29]

The ability to distil experience and the refusal to permit the intrusion of a political or social message become notable features of Graves's work during the 'thirties, and have remained there ever since. Like the poet's own life-style they represent a certain kind of detachment from the world, but this is not as wholly negative as J.G. Fletcher implied. In major poems like 'Pure Death', 'Time', or 'On Portents', there is a determined effort to 'chase truth out from the centre of an experience', and this, as Ronald Hayman says, constitutes 'an important achievement'.[30]

The economy of language and plainness of style developed by Graves in his poems of the 'thirties caught the attention of another reviewer of the 1938 collected edition. The late J.B. Bronowski dealt not only with Graves's volume but, significantly, with the Collected Poems of Laura Riding which was published in the same year. Although he favoured Miss Riding's work, and clearly regarded Graves in many ways as little more than her talented camp-follower, the distinction he drew between their techniques is crucial, and may help to explain why the one poet virtually gave up writing while the other has continued down the years. Speaking of Laura Riding's collection, Bronowski said:

> The fact seems to be (and perhaps only this book proves it) that images and poetic devices are only the flux in which the truth of poetry is carried; but without them the poetry is not carried at all. It is as if Laura Riding had discovered that words are only a vehicle for thought, and by their nature an indifferent vehicle which always caricatures the truth of the thought. She has drawn the logical conclusion that she should do without the vehicle; but the result is silence... [Graves], being less

29. F.W. Bateson, English Poetry and the English Language. (Oxford 1st Edn. 1934; 3rd edn. 1973), p.96.

30. Ronald Hayman, Essays in Criticism, 5 (Jan. 1955), 32-43.

> single-minded,... has not been able to make his practice as bare as she has. He has now rejected many of his poems which fall too far short of these beliefs. But what remains is still individual and inventive.[31]

It is precisely because Graves did not pursue Laura Riding's beliefs to their conclusion, and because his faith in the communicative power of poetry was finally greater than hers, that he has gone on practising his art. But it is equally true that the influence of Miss Riding on Graves's style during the decisive years between 1926 and 1938 was of paramount importance, a fact acknowledged by both Bronowski and Pettet. Indeed, the evolution of his style in this period forms a major part of the 'poetic liberation' Graves achieved in the work included in the last section of the Collected Poems (1938). Edwin Muir found that

> the fancy of the early poems is still delightful, and it survives the devastating analysis of the middle sections, to be used with far weightier effect in the last poems.

It has perhaps been one of Graves's fundamental assets and characteristics as a writer that he has been able to assimilate various aspects of his work in the positive way indicated by Muir. Of course, the major synthesis of his ideas and experience came in the account of the White Goddess myth, but there are lesser examples in the numerous stories, legends, proverbs, and illustrative sayings from countless sources with which Graves enhances his essays and criticism. All these show his remarkable capacity for drawing together the apparently random strands of his prodigious knowledge.

On the other hand, Laura Riding's career has been marked by quite another tendency. She was obsessed with the desire for pure and absolute communication, and with a sense of the inadequacy of almost all language to achieve her purpose. Her temperament led her to strip down language in an increasingly radical way which ultimately proved destructive to the art of poetry. Where her example helped Graves to evolve a new and richer poetic diction, it became a ritual of self-denial for herself, and her silence since 1938 has been broken only by the publication of her Selected Poems (1970), a difficult prose

31. J. Bronowski, The Cambridge Review, 60 (21 April 1939), 332-33.

treatise on language, The Telling (1972), and very occasional correspondence in American journals.

E.C. Pettet's review of Graves's writing up to 1938 was something of a pioneering article in that he sought to assess the impact and influence of the poetry and criticism upon his contemporaries. Furthermore, he argued that Graves's work 'offers one of the most revealing cross-sections of twentieth-century poetry to be found'. Both these claims are surprising when one considers that they were made in 1941, more than ten years before the upsurge of public interest in Graves began. It was 1956 before Martin Seymour-Smith published his British Council pamphlet as an introduction to Robert Graves's writings, and this was followed by J.M. Cohen's short study in 1960.[32] Not until 1964 was there a full-length book on Graves (Douglas Day's Swifter Than Reason), and so far this has only been followed by George Stade's booklet, Robert Graves (1967), and by Michael Kirkham's excellent volume, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969).[33]

Pettet recognized the weakness of the early poems, and regarded the war poems in particular as 'thin and ineffectual beside the profound pity of Owen and the precision and passion of Sassoon's blistering attack on militarism'. But he saw Graves beginning to develop his own voice in the post-war nightmare poems with 'their accent of personal anguish and distress'. Quoting from 'Rocky Acres', he continued:

> Above all, if the rural background of his work and the deliberate retreat into isolation and fantasy superficially resemble post-war Georgianism, he had already outgrown that mode; his verse is marked by a new vigour and ascetism (sic), reflected in the bareness and simplicity of much of his versification, that distinguishes it sharply from the gentle sensuousness of the Georgians.

Furthermore, Pettet maintained that Graves's interest in psychoanalytic theory, and the consequent 'un-Georgian self-awareness and self-probing' of his verse, made it 'a powerful stimulus to that mood of introspection that has been such a prominent feature of English poetry for the last twenty years'.

31. J.M. Cohen, Robert Graves (Edinburgh, 1960).
Martin Seymour-Smith, Robert Graves (1956; revised 1970).
33. Douglas Day, Swifter Than Reason (Chapel Hill; 1963).
George Stade, Robert Graves (New York; 1967).
Michael Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969).

As the effect of Freud's work - or, more exactly, of Rivers's version of Freud's work - influenced Graves in the early 'twenties, Einstein's theories are relevant to the 'anti-materialist, anti-rationalist, and relativist attitude' of his poetry in the next phase up to 1926. Pettet, however, conforms to the view that this period was a low ebb in Graves's poetic achievement, but goes on:

> At the same time it must be recognized (for Graves at this period, particularly in his critical work, was read far more widely than T.S. Eliot) that these poems exercised a most profound formative influence. Whatever their stumblings and confusions, they were at least a live and original force - the work of a poet who had brought the intelligence back to its rightful place in the poet's sensibility - even, paradoxically enough, when he was condemning the rationalist attitude, and of one who was attempting to include in his poetry the most important thought of his time. And if to-day we take this intellectual keenness and curiosity of our best poets for granted, we should be as grateful to Graves as to the revived metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, Hopkins, and T.S. Eliot in his early critical and poetic work.

This assessment places Graves in a much more central position of influence than is generally accorded him, though it is regrettable that Pettet did not specify particular instances of this influence in practice, or evidence to support his claim that in the mid-'twenties Graves's criticism was more widely read than that of Eliot. Nevertheless, it is a timely reminder that a writer who has often been regarded as having opted out of twentieth-century life more than most, was, in fact, fully aware of some of the major developments in thought as they were taking place.

We have seen the importance placed by Pettet on Poems 1926-1930, and he concluded that in the work of the 'thirties,

> apart from the deepened note of a new love-fulfilment in 'On Portents', 'To Whom Else?', and 'Like Snow', his

> subject-matter is still very much the same, while his style with its clean economy of words and vigorous, original imagery remains a thing for admiration.

Yet despite these undisputed achievements, E.C. Pettet was perhaps prophetic in questioning, as indeed did Edwin Muir, whether by 1938 Graves had revealed his limitations as a poet, and, by isolating himself from the modern world, had made his poetry 'exclusively a means of self-fulfilment'. Others have continued to investigate this issue, and thirty-four years after Pettet's article Philip Toynbee's review of the Collected Poems (1975) in The Observer was significantly headed 'Limits of Self-reliance'.[34] Toynbee admits that Graves 'has always been his own man, in the best sense of the phrase', but renews speculation whether his development as a poet has suffered for the sake of 'his splendid integrity and his impressive individuality'. But we also know that writers such as Stephen Spender, Donald Davie and F.W. Bateson have elected to see a special kind of triumph in the self-sufficient art of Robert Graves. None denies him his importance and skill as a poet, but critics now as then are obliged to debate, in George Steiner's words, 'the range of the instrument itself', and whether 'the highest intensities, the outermost splendours of language and emotion' are beyond it.[35]

34. Philip Toynbee, The Observer (26 Oct. 1975), p.30.
35. George Steiner, Kenyon Review, 22 (Summer 1960), 340-65.

Chapter One

The Development of Robert Graves's Poetic Theory and Practice between 1914 and 1938.

On the occasion of a radio broadcast made in 1975 to mark his eightieth birthday, Robert Graves asserted that he 'happened to be born in a wonderful period in which practically no poets were about'. The statement is characteristic of a man whose long career as a poet has been distinguished by constant striving for a truthful expression of his own vision. It is a career to which Graves has dedicated himself wholly since the end of the First World War, rejecting gainful employment other than writing apart from one short and unhappy spell of teaching, and, for the most part, living in the remote village of Deyà on Majorca since the late 1920's. He regards his novels and numerous other prose works as having only secondary and passing importance in comparison with the fruits of his true occupation as a poet. Often in his essays and criticism Graves appears eccentric, deliberately obtuse, sometimes even maverick, but over the years he has evolved a theory of poetry and of the nature of the true poet which invests him with dignity. The White Goddess is the central exposition of Graves's 'historical grammar of poetic myth', but it was not published until 1949 when he was already fifty-four. In it, Graves links the role of the poet to the ancient ritual worship and service offered to the supreme matriarchal deity, the White Goddess. By interpreting sources in ogham script and classical myth, he presents a case meant to show that worship of the goddess is the original form of religious ritual, patriarchal beliefs being merely a late and corrupt deviation which, according to Graves, have reduced the world to its present confusion and fostered its obsession with materialism and rationalism. True poets have always known that patriarchal religion is wrong and throughout the ages they have been servants of the goddess, however ambiguously they have occupied this role. Thus, for example, in Graves's opinion, John Skelton, whom he has long championed, was a devotee of the goddess despite his official public position as rector of Diss in Norfolk. In ancient societies the bard was a respected and feared person, and it is Graves's view that in modern times the muse poet, sometimes a figure of fun but more often simply ignored, has a particularly vital role to play because there are so many pressures against his vision of truth.

This theory or myth has provided Robert Graves with an active source of reference upon which he has drawn in his poetry for over a quarter of a century. Any change in his opinions - such as his proclamation of another mythical figure, the Black Goddess - amounts to an extension of the original idea rather than a fundamental alteration of it. Since The White Goddess is the cornerstone of Graves's poetic beliefs, it is important to investigate how and why he reached the conclusions it proposes. We are told that the book

> took the form of an unsolicited enlightenment on a subject I knew almost nothing of ... my mind worked at such a furious rate all night, as well as the next day, that my pen found it difficult to keep pace with the flow of my thought...Within three weeks I had written a 70,000 word book about the ancient Mediterranean Moon-goddess whom Homer invoked in the Iliad, and whom one of his sons, or (as some people prefer to think) one of his daughters, invoked in the Odyssey: and to whom most traditional poets ever since have paid at any rate lip-service.[1]

Yet as one reads the early poems and Graves's provisional theories of poetry it becomes apparent that, far from being isolated or freakish, The White Goddess is an imaginative synthesis of many long-pondered ideas. It is not merely a synthesis, however, for the special achievement of the book is that it places individual and private ideas within the perspective of an age-old religious ritual, thus giving them universal and permanent significance.

In order to grasp why this myth appealed to Graves, and to understand better how deeply the ideas behind it are rooted in his own personality and experience, it is necessary to examine certain decisive influences on his development. Born in 1895 in Wimbledon, Robert Graves was the son of Amalia von Ranke and Alfred Perceval Graves. We derive the impression from his autobiography, Goodbye To All That, that the poet's home was austere and strict, and that his father, who was an inspector of schools, was a remote figure often absent in connection with his work. A.P. Graves was also a minor literary figure and song writer, and his son has provided a vivid record of the impression made upon him by books when he recalled 'looking up with a sort of despondent terror

1. Steps (1958), pp.86-7.

at a cupboard in the nursery, which stood accidentally open and which was filled to the ceiling with octavo volumes of Shakespeare'.[2] No doubt these same volumes were used when distinguished visitors came to the house to participate in A.P. Graves's Shakespeare reading circle. According to his son, this early contact with literary personalities, and the fact that his father was one of their number, saved him from any false reverence for writers. At the same time, it is typical of him that he tells with pride how, as a baby, when his nurse was wheeling him out on Wimbledon Common, he was touched by Swinburne, who as a boy had himself been touched by Landor, who in turn had been patted on the head by Dr. Johnson. The Celtic blood in Graves is strong enough to make an incident like that particularly striking.

'Despondent terror' was not the only feeling which literature inspired in the boy, however, and the opening poem of his first collection, Over the Brazier, presents a very different reaction.[3] 'Since the age of fifteen poetry has been my ruling passion,' wrote Graves in The White Goddess, 'and I have never intentionally undertaken any task or formed any relationship that seemed inconsistent with poetic principles.'[4] The strength of this passion is conveyed in 'The Poet in the Nursery', where the writer identifies himself with 'The youngest poet' who is engaged in exploring the

> ...dim library, just behind the chair
> From which the ancient poet was mum-mumbling
> A song about some lovers at a Fair,
> Pulling his long white beard and gently grumbling
> That rhymes were beastly things and never there.

This opening stanza introduces three ideas which are exploited in the poem. Firstly, we see the child in a literary environment: the title suggests either that his nursery is a library, or that as the 'youngest poet' he is still at the nursery stage in his artistic development; possibly it implies both these ideas. In any case, writing poetry is a natural activity, and one in which, as the second stanza makes clear, the child already participates. He does so with the gusto and enthusiasm of youth as opposed to the laborious efforts at composition

2. GBTAT (1929), pp.14-5.
3. OB (1916), p.4.
4. The White Goddess (1st edn. 1948; rpt. 1971), p.17.

made by the old man.

The second interesting idea is the ancient poet's 'mum-mumbling', which invokes the incantatory nature of poetry, but also helps to prepare us for the third point, that poetry is demanding and difficult to write: the rhymes, more appropriately described as 'troublesome things' in Poems 1914-1926, create problems for the artist.[5]

The 'ancient poet' is not alone in encountering obstacles in his work, for the child is preoccupied with thoughts about 'the tragic poem I'd been writing'. His work is committed to ambitious themes that combine elements of boys' adventure stories and moralistic tales. It deals with

> An old man's life of beer and whisky drinking,
> His years of kidnapping and wicked fighting;
> And how at last, into a fever sinking,
> Remorsefully he died, his bedclothes biting.

The boy is undaunted by the remoteness of these experiences from anything in his own life, but his lively and restless mind is easily distracted by objects of more immediate appeal, as becomes apparent in the third stanza when he suddenly notices

> ...the bright green cover
> Of a thin pretty book right down below.

His previous actions in the 'dim library' were described as uncertain ('fumbling', 'groped'); but the colour of the book, followed by the discovery that it contains poetry, lead to a contrasting series of single-minded and determined movements:

> I snatched it up and turned the pages over,
> To find it full of poetry, and so
> Put it down my neck with quick hands like a lover
> And turned to watch if the old man saw it go.

The simile suggests the sort of dedication and passion which the child already associates with poetry.

Unlike the work of both the ancient and the youngest poet, the green-covered book is complete, and the last two stanzas celebrate the qualities in it which fascinate and delight the child. Above all,

5. P 1914-1926 (1927), pp.3-4.

the sound of words rather than their sense appeals to him. The unsatisfactory 'mum-mumbling' of the opening stanza is replaced by something richer and more structured, yet also more mysterious:

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

From one point of view the comparison of rhymes with a slave-driver's thong belongs again to the realm of boys' adventure story, but it is also appropriate in that the thong was used to bind the slaves together just as rhyme binds the verse. Likewise, the chain of daisies is an image of unity and continuity, and metre serves both these ends. Perhaps the most effective figure of speech, however, is the hyperbole in the last line of the stanza. Here the writer stresses the exotic nature of poetry by an exaggeration of the precise kind a child might use.

The fascination generated by the word sounds is reiterated in the last verse, for we are told that the boy learnt 'the lines that seemed most grand'. Captivated as he is by the words themselves before he can understand them rationally, his approval is unchecked by other critical considerations, and the intensity of his feeling for poetry is obvious:

> ... soon the pretty emerald green was coated
> With jam and greasy marks from my hot hand.

The revised version of these lines in Poems 1914-1926 makes an even fuller acknowledgment of the feelings involved by adopting a more mature form of expression:

> ... soon the lively emerald green was coated
> With intimate dark stains from my hot hand.

Although 'The Poet in the Nursery' has been out of print since 1927, it was one of only six poems from Over the Brazier to remain in circulation

until then. Its main value now is as an insight into Graves's deep feeling for and involvement in poetry, both as reader and writer, from an early age. Despite the child's strictly limited and romantic understanding of poetry, his response to it is unequivocal and direct .

'The Poet in the Nursery' was not the only poem in which Graves expressed his enthusiasm for writing. In 'Free Verse', a vigorous, fast-moving poem recalling both Skelton and Hood, Graves asserts his determination to write independently 'Of the might/And the right/ Of classic tradition', and the pleasure he derives from this.[6] The poem was later retitled 'In Spite', which is more appropriate in that it underlines the writer's defiant intention.[7] He rejects the formality, regularity and stiffness of verse written in the 'classic tradition', comparing its rhymes with

> ... Prussian soldiers on parade
> That march,
> Stiff as starch,
> Foot to foot,
> Boot to boot,
> Blade to blade,
> Button to button,
> Cheeks and chops and chins like mutton.

Here the short lines and clipped alliterative sounds image the uniformity and rigid discipline of a style which precludes the unpredictability and individuality the poet desires. He launches a second, wittier attack on regular verse by accumulating a series of verbs all of which suggest the violent manipulation required to turn out 'a uniform stanza' (e.g. 'poke', 'choke', 'change', 'arrange', 'straight-lace', 'deface', 'pleat', 'sheet',[8] 'chop', 'chew', 'hack', 'hew', 'weld'). Having thus insisted on the artificiality of such verse-making, Graves says that this is needed in order to

> ... evolve a neat,
> Complacent, complete
> Academic extravaganza.

'Evolve' is the last word we would expect, and is, of course, deliberately

6. OB (1916), pp.13-4.
7. P 1914-1926, pp.5-6.
8. In the 1916 edition of OB these lines read:

> Sheet it with sheets
> Of empty meaningless conceits,...

whereas in the 1920 reprint, and thereafter, the word 'meaningless' is

incongruous, suggesting a process of natural development which has been shown to bear no relation to such poetry. As well as satirizing regular verse, Graves indicates the characteristics of style towards which he aspires:

> My rhymes must go
> Turn'ee, twist'ee
> Twinkling, frosty
> Will-o-the-wisp-like, misty,
> Rhymes I will make
> Like Keats and Blake,
> And Christina Rossetti,
> With run and ripple and shake.

Although the lines are still carried along by the strong rhythm, there is variation in the pace, and a certain relaxation in the sounds, demonstrating the flexibility and freedom which the poet missed in verse in the 'classic tradition'.

The energy and strategic verbal wit of 'Free Verse' make it unique in Over the Brazier. It is not burdened with inappropriate sentiments evoked by an undue use of adjectives, as are other early poems such as 'The Dying Knight and the Fauns', '1915' and 'A Dead Boche', but it is a significant indication of Graves's ability to write with economy and precision. Skelton, for whom Graves's affection has been mentioned, was an early and lasting influence, and he has defined his reactions to the wayward Tudor clergyman in both verse and prose. In 'John Skelton' he wrote:

> ...angrily, wittily,
> Tenderly, prettily,
> Laughingly, learnedly,
> Sadly, madly,
> Helter-skelter John
> Rhymes serenely on,
> As English poets should.
> Old John, you do me good ! [9]

Some years later, in Poetic Unreason, Graves declared:

> Skelton has had a stronger influence on my work than any other poet alive or dead: particularly I have admired in him his

9. FF (1917), pp.41-3.

> mixture of scholarship and extravaganza, his honest outspokenness and unconventionality in life and writings, his humour, his poetic craftsmanship, and, in spite of appearances, his deep religious sense.[10]

Without exception the qualities which Graves praised in Skelton also distinguish his own life and writings.

In Goodbye To All That he refers to a book he had containing the ballads of 'Chevy Chase' and 'Sir Andrew Barton', and he comments that these 'were the first two real poems that I remember reading. I saw how good they were.'[11] This early discovery of ballads was another important formative influence because Graves later adopted in whole or in part the plain style, dialogue, and unexpected twist in the conclusion characteristic of many of these poems. In Over the Brazier we find the rather trite 'Star Talk', but this is followed in later collections by 'A Frosty Night', 'The Cupboard', 'Outlaws', 'The Stake', and other ballad poems.[12] His interest in ballads was supplemented by a fondness for nursery-rhymes, another traditional form of poetry distinguished by plain style. On the matter of directness of expression, Graves records that at his preparatory school in the Midlands he had a teacher who 'taught me how to write English by eliminating all phrases that could be done without, and using verbs and nouns instead of adjectives and adverbs wherever possible'.[13] This was a sound lesson for an aspiring writer and the pupil mastered it.

Thus we form the impression that the boyhood and youth of Robert Graves were spent in privileged and affluent circumstances, although there seems to have been little extravagance. He enjoyed an awareness of literature, particularly of poetry, from an early age, and was soon imaginatively drawn to the idea of writing although nothing indicates that he received encouragement in this aim. As a member of the upper class, he inherited the prejudices and attitudes of his section of the community. For example, it is interesting that he specifically mentions in his autobiography 'how completely I believed in the natural supremacy of male over female. I never even heard it questioned until I met Nancy (Nicholson) when I was about twenty-two, towards the end of the war.'[14] Clearly this was a sphere in which he was later to

10. Graves, Poetic Unreason (1925), p.240.
11. GBTAT (1929), p.39.
12. OB (1916), pp.5-6 (For 'Star-Talk').
    CS (1920), pp.11-2 (for 'A Frosty Night'); pp.47-8 (for 'The Cupboard'); pp.40-1 (for 'Outlaws); PG (1921), p.11 (for 'The Stake').
13. GBTAT (1929), p.41.
14. Ibid., p.51.

revise his opinions. Despite his assurance of male supremacy, embarrassment and fear were his dominant feelings towards girls, and these reactions were later heightened by the effects of his war experiences. In Goodbye To All That, Graves attributes his responses to his early religious training and the fear of hell which it engendered in him, and he comments that he was 'very long indeed' in ridding himself of this.[15]

From the outset Graves drew upon the literary influence of earlier models, particularly the traditional forms of ballad, nursery-rhyme and song. This may in part be explained by the poet's comment quoted earlier that there were no major English poets alive when he was growing up. Hardy might be considered an exception to this statement, but he was a traditionalist himself, influenced by folk sources. The so-called Georgian poets with whom Graves's name was associated during the war years did not really affect his style. In so far as they sought to use plain language, Graves may be deemed one of their brotherhood, but he usually avoids the triteness of theme which often marred their work, although 'Jolly Yellow Moon' [16] and '1915', [17] described by Michael Kirkham as 'typical of Georgianism at its least inspired', may be considered examples to the contrary. [18] In general, however, the events of the war years initiated poetry on themes and obsessions which Graves pursued very much in his own way, and out of which he later shaped his aesthetic theory.

From our own point in time it is easy to forget that Graves was a comrade of Sassoon and Owen in the trenches and that he was first known as a war poet, for not only is his reputation in this capacity insignificant in comparison with theirs, but a glance at the contents of his Collected Poems (1975) shows that with the possible exception of 'Armistice Day 1918', which is placed in the section headed 'Occasionalia', nothing suggests his deep involvement in the fighting.[19] For most people, Robert Graves's contribution to the literature of war is his autobiography, Goodbye To All That, which did not appear till eleven years after the Armistice. It is worth noting that the disciplined irony and frank, factual tone of this record were only achieved after such a lapse of time, because for Graves, as for so

15. Ibid., pp.32-3.
16. OB (1916), p.10.
17. Ibid., p.30.
18. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.11.
19. CP (1975), pp.451-52.

many other survivors of his generation, the First World War had a radical and lasting effect which was not easily assimilated. Until this point can be appreciated and evaluated, it is difficult to make sense of the particular directions he later took as a poet. Bernard Bergonzi has observed that 'the war of 1914-1918 can still very properly be referred to by its original name of the Great War; for despite the greater magnitude of its more truly global successor, it represented a far more radical crisis in British civilization'.[20] Not only was Graves caught up in this crisis, it came at a decisive stage in his own career. He left Charterhouse and joined the army a few days after his nineteenth birthday, hoping that the action might last just long enough to delay his departure for Oxford in October 1914, and firm in the belief 'that France and England had been drawn into a war which they had never contemplated and for which they were entirely unprepared'.[21] Like many other recruits, Graves himself had no psychological, emotional or military preparation for what was to follow his enlistment. This predicament and its effects were described in 'The War and the Poets', an essay by Douglas Goldring, which might have been written with specific reference to Robert Graves. Goldring says:

> Many of these Public Schoolboy soldiers must have gone straight from the cricket-field and the prefect's study to the trenches, in a kind of waking dream. Their mental equipment for withstanding the shock of experience was as useless as the imitation suit of armour, the dummy lance and shield of the actor in a pageant. It was their false conception of life, their inability to look at facts except through tinted glasses of one particular colour, which rendered the poems of so many of these young subalterns so valueless as literature, so tragic and accusing as human documents.[22]

In one published only in the first edition of Over the Brazier, and called, significantly, 'A Renascence', Graves voiced a poetic commonplace of the time, the romanticism of which belongs to the world of pageant mentioned by Goldring.

20. Bernard Bergonzi, Heroes' Twilight (1965), p.17.
21. GBTAT (1929), p.99.
22. Bergonzi, Heroes' Twilight (1965), p.62.

On Achi Baba's rock their bones
Whiten, and on Flanders' plain,
But of their travailings and groans
Poetry is born again. [23]

Bewildered by the pressure of events yet driven by the wish to write, Graves responded on the one hand by seeing war as a game in which

One moment you'll be crouching at your gun
Traversing, mowing heaps down half in fun:
The next, you choke and clutch at your right breast -
No time to think - leave all - and off you go...
To Treasure Island where the Spice winds blow; [24]

and, on the other hand, as an ugly, sordid and distressing experience:

...propped against a shattered trunk,
in a great mess of things unclean
Sat a dead Boche: he scowled and stunk.
With clothes and face a sodden green,
Big-bellied, spectacled, crop-haired,
Dribbling black blood from nose and beard. [25]

The first quotation comes from 'It's a Queer Time', which Graves later admitted was 'written from the Depôt in England months before I had the chance of verifying it', a fact that indicates the degree to which he felt he ought to be dealing with the subject of war.[26] But the idea of war as a game, the banality with which death is imagined, and the depiction of it as a kind of interruption, an exchange of one adventure for another, are features recurrent in other poems of the period. 'It's a Queer Time' represents one aspect of Graves's attempt to deal with his war experiences, the endeavour to interpret events in nursery-rhyme forms and language. The effect of this is often incongruous, and nowhere more so than in 'The First Funeral'.[27] Here he specifically parallels his reaction to the first corpse he saw, which was snared in the German wires and could not be buried, with his first encounter with death as a child when he smelt, and subsequently found, a dead dog in a field. As in the poem 'A Dead Boche', there is a morbid obsession with the details of the dog's body:

23. OB (1916), p.20.
24. Ibid., pp.29-30.
25. FF (1917), p.33.
26. Graves, Poetic Unreason (1925), p.39.
27. OB (1916), pp.23-4.

His horrid swollen belly
    Looked just like going burst.
His fur was most untidy;
    He hadn't any eyes.
It happed on Good Friday
    And there was lots of flies.

The idiom is that of a child: 'Untidy' is deliberately inappropriate and casual speech. Careful reading belies the apparent innocence of the reference to Good Friday. It is a day associated with a death of supreme religious significance, and to juxtapose it with the dog's death and mock funeral as they are described here makes a travesty of Good Friday. This is because the poet is obsessed merely with the physical ugliness of death: the dog is buried and mint is strewn round in order 'To hide the nasty smell'. The loss of life, whether it is the German soldier's or the dog's life, arouses in the poet a disgust to which he cannot reconcile himself, and the result is that he seeks to offend the reader by forcing him to experience the same revulsion. There is no moral purpose behind writing of this kind. It is motivated by revenge. This revenge is aimed indiscriminately at the adult world, or that part of it which was responsible for sending Graves to France.

It is not surprising that Graves's reactions were anarchic, emotionally charged and self-centred. The compassion and pity Owen felt for others was not only profound but also rare, and Robert Graves was too insecure and uncertain in himself to share them. As one reads poems like 'The First Funeral' and 'A Dead Boche', the impression is of experience which has overwhelmed the poet and left him reaching desperately for a familiar form or romantic commonplaces with which to defend his outraged sensibility. It is instructive to contrast the description of the corpse in 'A Dead Boche' and the account given of the same incident in Goodbye To All That. Here Graves tells how he went into Mametz Wood to improve his own men's bivouac conditions:

> Going and coming by the only possible route, I had to pass by the corpse of a German with his back propped against a tree. He had a green face, spectacles, close-shaven hair; black

> blood was dripping from the nose and beard. He had been there for some days and was bloated and stinking.[28]

The poem's failure was reflected in its style, and although the details and vocabulary are almost exactly the same in the prose passage, the clipped, matter-of-fact tone - notice how he writes 'the nose and beard', thus stressing the impersonality of the corpse - does not claim any high moral purpose. In fact, it is more disturbing as a deadpan understatement than the poem was as an attempt to rouse passionate protest against 'lust of blood', for a mere bombardment of adjectives does not in itself create a powerful effect. The poem, we feel, has 'a palpable design upon us', and, like Keats, we resist this. The prose takes us unawares, and we find it hard to avoid.

However, the fact that Graves was seeking a framework within which to organise his feelings is significant, inadequate as nursery-rhymes and romantic extravagances were to his needs. Some of his more successful poems of the period show him using other devices. One such work is 'Faun'.[29] Here a deeply felt personal emotion - the poet's sense of lost freedom and happiness - is captured with particular effectiveness. The two stanzas contrast with one another, the first being a celebration and the second a lament. The 'King Faun' may be understood as Poetry or Truth, and also as the poet himself, who is at once more than man and less than God. The natural emphases in the first three lines prepare for the speed of the change in the second stanza by stressing that King Faun's joy is remote in neither time nor place:

> Here down this very way,
> Here only yesterday
> King Faun went leaping.

His lack of care and his safety cause him to sing

> 'Here Faun is free,
> Here Faun is free ! '

The movement of the verse slows in the second stanza as the mood changes:

28. GBTAT (1929), p.264.
29. FF (1917), p.34.

To-day against yon pine,
Forlorn yet still divine,
King Faun leant weeping.
'They drank my holy brook,
My strawberries they took,
My private path they trod.'
Loud wept the desolate God,
Scorn on scorn heaping,
'Faun, what is he,
Faun what is he? '

It is interesting that despite his change of circumstances, the Faun retains his divinity, for another poem of the period, 'Babylon', seems to imply that this quality is lost along with innocence.[30] The actual violation of freedom, security and happiness, and the somewhat self-pitying identification of the poet with this, are conveyed in the thrice repeated 'my'. It is the poem's framework of pastoral myth which preserves it from becoming entirely self-indulgent at this point. In the concluding four lines it is further redeemed by the use of two devices associated with Graves's later poetry. Firstly, there is the use of the word 'desolate'. Michael Kirkham has observed shrewdly that

> its primary, mental sense applies to the faun's emotions, but in its secondary, physical sense - a literal laying-waste - it applies also to his invaded lands, and (in a poem where the majority of its neighbouring poems are about war) inevitably connects the man-god's despair with the desolation of the battlefield in France. This opening up of a word's associations so that it becomes both precise and resonant with suggestion is characteristic of the art of Graves's mature verse.[31]

The second notable feature is the concluding question mark. This has become an increasingly common form of ending in much of the poet's recent work. It testifies to his belief that asking the right questions is often more important than trying to supply neat answers. The question

30. Ibid., pp.14-5.
31. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.23.

to which this poem leads concerns the fundamental matter of personal identity and it is one which came to dominate most of Graves's verse in the immediate post-First World War period.

If pastoral myth saves 'Faun' from excessive self-pity, the framework used for another poem - dealing with his believed death in action on 20th July, 1916 - was less successful. Obviously this was a traumatic event for the writer, and one he was extremely lucky to survive. The indelible impression made on him by his brush with death is perhaps suggested by the fact that he chose to have 'Escape' read in the recent B.B.C. radio tribute although it has been out of print since 1927.[32] Here, in order to discipline his confused personal feelings, he endeavoured to place the experience against a mythological background; but a close reading of the poem reveals a basic uncertainty of tone and occasional incongruities in the particular references.

The poem opens with a categorically insistent claim:

> But I <u>was</u> dead, an hour or more:
> I woke when I'd already passed the door
> That Cerberus guards and half-way down the road
> To Lethe, as an old Greek sign post showed.

The references to Cerberus, guardian of the entrance to the underworld, and to Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, suggest the gravity of the poet's predicament, but this is not altogether borne out by the mention of 'an old Greek signpost' which seems to belong to a much less sinister landscape. The tone becomes almost jaunty in the next two lines as we are told how

> Above me, on my stretcher swinging by,
> I saw new stars in the subterrene sky.

The significance of the stars is unclear. The Cross, changed to 'A Key' in the foreword to <u>Collected Poems</u> (1938), suggests Christian symbolism, but 'a Rose in bloom', and 'a Cage with bars' have no such obvious associations.[33] The reference to 'a barbed Arrow feathered in fine stars' may relate to the barbed arrow-heads found in funeral barrows built by the 'bronze-weaponed, broad-headed, beaker-making, avenue-building people' who invaded Britain in the period 2000-1500 B.C.[34]

32. <u>FF</u> (1917), pp.63-4.
33. <u>CP</u> (1938), pp.xvii-xviii.
34. Graves, <u>The White Goddess</u> (1971), p.70.

In each case, no definite allusion has been established. This is followed by a more serious return to the mythological conceit as Graves thanks

> Dear Lady Proserpine, who saw me wake
> And, stooping over me, for Henna's sake
> Cleared my poor buzzing head and sent me back
> Breathless, with leaping heart along the track.

Proserpine is sympathetic because she too was snatched rudely from earthly life when Pluto came upon her gathering flowers in the vale of Henna. There then comes a further change of tone, for on his return journey the poet imagines he is pursued by 'angry hosts/Of demons, heroes, and policeman-ghosts'. The mood here is comic, whether or not this was intended, for the ghosts offer no credible threat to the escaping spirit. The most convincing lines in the poem so far are the last two in the first stanza -

> 'Life, life! I can't be dead, I won't be dead:
> Damned if I'll die for anyone', I said -

where the intense determination rings true, and is not compromised by any suggestion of comedy.

In the second verse, Graves describes how he tricked Cerberus in order to make good his escape. The deliberately disjointed lines evoke the urgency of the occasion, and the poet's desperation:

> ...no bombs...no knife... (the crowd swarms on,
> Bellows, hurls stones)... not even a honeyed sop...
> Nothing...Good Cerberus...Good dog...but stop!

The 'honeyed sop' recalls the morsel with honey and drugged corn which the Priestess gave Cerberus to enable Aeneas to visit the underworld, and also the account of how Hercules overcame Cerberus. The mention of the dog's three heads - lion, lynx and sow - is illuminated by a subsequent comment in The White Goddess. Commenting on 'the weirdly azoological beasts' that appear in the circle of the zodiac, Graves declared that 'Cerberus', a bitch miscalled a dog, is also likely to appear in the circle: a cognate beast, with the usual triad of heads - lioness, lynx, and sow. The lynx is an

autumn beast'. [35] Once more, however, the idea he uses to account for his own flight is comic: his substitute for the morsels used by the Priestess and Hercules is army biscuit smeared with jam and morphia. Cerberus is overcome by the poppy, and collapses:

> ... the beast blocks up the corridor
> With monstrous hairy carcase, red and dun -
> Too late: for I've sped through.
> O Life! O Sun!

The concluding emotion is of jubilant liberation, and is achieved by the contrast between the threatening image of the carcase, which effectively suggests how narrow the escape has been, and the poet's renewed sense of life.

As a whole, however, 'Escape' is not a successful poem. Its uncertainty of tone derives from two related reasons. For Graves himself, the experience had obviously been shattering. After his earlier imaginative speculations on death in battle, he had seemingly done the impossible - died, and yet returned to life. Any account of this phenomenon would of necessity be inadequate. In Goodbye To All That, Graves limited himself to a factual account of his injuries and of what he remembered in the hours immediately after he received them, and, like the prose description of the dead German soldier, this is more satisfactory. It rings true in a way that, apart from the concluding lines of both stanzas, 'Escape' does not. The poet did not intend to suggest that his escape was funny or that death was insignificant, and yet his choice of mythology inclines us to think in that way. Cerberus and Proserpine, like the demon ghosts, exist merely as literary references. The one exception to this, the image of escape in the concluding lines, has already received comment. Literary references dissociated from emotional connotations fail to stir the imagination. One can accept the visits of Aeneas and Hercules to the underworld because of the contexts in which they occur, but the idea of an unrequested visit by Robert Graves, and his escape by dint of a doped army biscuit, cannot be taken seriously. The idea of using some kind of external framework to discipline his experience may have been sound, but the particular choice was unfortunate.

35. Ibid., p.409.

This failure to find an adequately supportive myth may be contrasted with his one really successful poetic adaptation of a well-known story during these early years. 'Goliath and David' uses the familiar biblical story as a framework, but differs from the usual account.[36] Here Graves assumes a part, that of true historian and debunker of distorted reports, to which he turned ever more often in the 'twenties. He tells us that the original 'historian of that fight/Had not the heart to tell it right', and we receive the first indication of what is going to happen in the very title of the poem, 'Goliath and David', where the usual order of the names is reversed.

The opening lines stir our feelings for David in a way which is to prove ironic:

> Once an earlier David took
> Smooth pebbles from the brook:
> Out between the lines he went
> To that one-sided tournament.

We are aware of the vulnerability of David faced with 'a Philistine/ Clad in brazen mail', but our knowledge of the Bible story leads us to assume that the one-sidedness of the duel refers to Goliath's ineffectiveness before a divinely supported enemy. It is precisely because we do make this assumption that Graves is able to achieve a poetic coup de main. In the final revision of this poem published in Poems 1914-1926,[37] two additional lines were placed at the beginning, in which David utters a challenge to the giant:

> 'If I am Jesse's son', said he,
> 'Where must that tall Goliath be? '

The added dramatic impact leads the reader even further into misplacing his confidence in the traditionally accepted victor. David continues to boast about his successes in killing lions and bears, and at this point the words of the poem follow closely the biblical account in 1 Samuel 17, vv. 34-37.[38] It is only after these boasts that we are given the poet's warning that the old story is not the true one. David's attack is presented as a calm and calculated series of actions: his

36. GD (1916), pp.5-6.
37. P 1914-1926 (1927), pp.51-2.
38. For this note, please see
* page 234 of this thesis.

...clear eye measures the length;
With hand thrust back, he cramps one knee,
Poises a moment thoughtfully,
And hurls with a long vengeful swing.

In contrast with this, its futility is admirably suggested by the words used to describe the sound of the pebbles striking Goliath's shield: 'a brazen clink' and 'Clang! clang! and clang! ' This feeble outcome makes David look ridiculous, and Goliath regards him with contempt:

Scorn blazes in the Giant's eye
Towering unhurt six cubits high.

The boy, now described as 'foolish David', renews the attack with his shepherd's staff which has broken 'The skull of many a wolf and fox', but this time his boasts are more difficult for us to accept. The laughter of Goliath that 'Can scatter chariots like blown chaff/To rout' seems far from being an empty threat. Suddenly David's courage, based on his belief that 'God will save', appears naive and ignorant, and the poet hastens to convince us of this in the closing lines:

Steel crosses wood, a flash, and oh!
Shame for Beauty's overthrow!
(God's eyes are dim, His ears are shut.)
One cruel backhand sabre-cut -
'I'm hit, I'm killed', young David cries,
Throws blindly forward, chokes...and dies.
And look, spike-helmeted, grey, grim,
Goliath straddles over him.

This is, as it were, a demystification of the Bible story:
David is just as vulnerable as he seems, and is not protected by any unique power or grace, for God, if He is there at all, is not interested in intervening to save him. From the ease with which David is defeated, his pathetic, almost surprised cry as he discovers his total isolation, the anti-climax of his death, and the striking image of destructive might in the last two lines, we derive a detailed awareness of the insignificance of the individual soldier in battle. Michael Kirkham is

right in saying that the poet's horror of death emerges more truly from the image of Goliath straddling his victim than from the obsessive physical details of the corpse in 'A Dead Boche'. He adds: 'This picture has the power of emblem - depicting the crual gloating Death as a combination of German soldier, biblical and Celtic giant.'[39] Here Graves comes closer to evoking pity for the futility of lives thrown away in war than anywhere else in his poetry of the period, and his success undoubtedly depends upon his choice of an allegorical story which successfully avoids the problem that arose in 'Escape'.

Perhaps the most obvious conclusion to be drawn from the poems we have examined and which can be endorsed by other early works, is that Graves had no clear sense of direction in his writing at first. The experiences of war appalled him, though their long-term consequences were to be more important and decisive for his art than the immediate and overwhelming present. Initially he turned to various styles and forms in the hope of organising and articulating his feelings, but in common with other poets of those years, he encountered limitations on every hand. Yet the confusion evident in Graves's poetry during and just after the Great War is ultimately less important than his awareness of the need for a shaping and distancing framework within which to write. It has been shown that when he came to write Goodbye To All That in 1929, Graves's account of the war was controlled and ironic in a way that had almost always eluded him eleven years before. For his mature poetic reflections on the subject we have to wait a further nine years. 'Recalling War',[40] described by Michael Kirkham as 'Graves's finest war poem... an attempt to set against the pre-war accepted view of life the consciousness of evil that his experiences of fighting had released in him',[41] first appeared in Collected Poems (1938), where it reads not simply as an assessment of history but as a prophecy of the immediate future. The poet recaptures the unique enthusiasm and excitement generated in the early days of the war, echoing both the sentiments and words of Rupert Brooke's famous sonnets of 1914:[42]

> 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.

39. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.24.
40. CP (1938), pp.129-130.
41. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves, (1969), p.170.
42. Rupert Brooke, Poetical Works, ed. G. Keynes (1946; rptd. 1970), p.19 and p.21.

But war also led to destruction, 'the ache of wounds beyond all surgeoning', though paradoxically even this had a positive aspect in that it cut through the wilful blindness and delusions

> By which the world had still kept head in air,
> Protesting logic or protecting love,
> Until the unendurable moment struck -
> The inward scream, the duty to run mad.

The final stanza is deeply ironic and pessimistic, and in it Graves even seems to point an accusing finger at his own early reactions to battle for, twenty years later, he sees men once more talking of the war in sentimental nursery images:

> And we recall the merry ways of guns -
> Nibbling the walls of factory and church
> Like a child, piecrust; felling groves of trees
> Like a child, dandelions with a switch!
> Machine-guns rattle toy-like from a hill,
> Down in a row the brave tin-soldiers fall:
> A sight to be recalled in elder days
> When learnedly the future we devote
> To yet more boastful visions of despair.

In 'Recalling War', time gave Graves the perspective he had previously lacked, and the deeply felt emotion is now controlled and directed to produce the ironic power behind the poem. This appears to be his last direct statement on the war in his poetry, and, regrettably, even it has been dropped from recent collected editions.

Apart from the serious physical injuries he sustained, the war produced in Graves a state of neurasthenia which dominated his personal life, art and theory of poetry for years afterwards. A major symptom of the poet's nervous disorder was his repeated sense of being haunted in dreams provoked by memories of his experiences in France. Dreams assumed enormous importance in his life because they were at once appalling and inescapable. Some of them recalled the fighting: 'shells used to come bursting on my bed at midnight, even when Nancy was sharing it with me,' we are told in Goodbye To All That.[43]

43. GBTAT (1929), p.352.

In 'A Child's Nightmare' he records the panic induced by neurasthenia, especially the particular image of his fear, a 'gigantic, formless, queer' cat, shown to have its origins in Nursery Land.[44] Since Graves normally referred to childhood as a time of security and unalloyed happiness, this is an unexpected departure. It enables him to establish an unusual degree of continuity between childhood and adult experience. The first two stanzas concern themselves with the early distress caused by

> That same hideous nightmare thing,
> Talking, as he lapped my blood,
> In a voice cruel and flat,
> Saying forever, 'Cat!... Cat!... Cat!...'

The poet knows that logically his fear may be absurd, but this is complemented by his equal certainty that 'there's Nonsense that can keep/Horror bristling round the head', a comment which, as J.M. Cohen observed, suggests

> the relationship that he was later to develop between the nursery nonsense that formed his refuge from the crude impact of war and that other nonsense of dreams - in which figures emerged that were more baleful than comforting.[45]

Although the dream faded as he grew older, it overtook him again 'From the clank of a night train', and thus the whole sequence of terror is renewed. As Graves specifically mentions that the noise of trains caused him nervous tension and distress in the post-war years, this may be taken as a direct reflection of one of the symptons of his own illness. The battlefield itself is the next scene in which the cat reappears, and the image becomes more horrific as it is seen through a morphia haze when the poet is wounded:

> He was there with straddling legs,
> Staring eyes as big as eggs,
> Purring as he lapped my blood,
> His black bulk darkening the day,
> With voice cruel and flat,
> 'Cat!... Cat!... Cat!...' he said,
> 'Cat!... Cat!...'

44. FF (1917), pp.61-2.
45. J.M. Cohen, Robert Graves (1960), p.14.

The phrase 'straddling legs' reminds us of the triumphant figure of Goliath as he loomed over the fallen David, and the reference to 'His black bulk darkening the day' is akin to the 'monstrous hairy carcase' of Cerberus which blocked the corridor from the underworld in 'Escape'. In this context the repetition of the word 'Cat' clearly represents the monotonous clatter of gunfire, and so what was originally an illogical dream has become associated with real physical danger. The poet expects this sound, still reaching him as the word 'Cat', to be the last thing he hears as he lies 'shot through heart and head'. Although the cat is a less effective and more immature image than either Cerberus or Goliath, this is one of the few poems in which Graves tried to link the past with his present experiences.

Other dreams confronted him with lurid and frightening visions of sex, arousing distress and feelings of guilt. The effect of this was far-reaching. In poems such as 'A Frosty Night', 'The Cupboard', 'Apples and Water', and 'The Pier-Glass', sexual relations are presented as a source of tension, alienation, and even violence.[46] The first three of these poems are modelled on the question and answer form of ballad, a typical example of which is 'Lord Randal'. At the end of 'A Frosty Night', the mother, who has been interrogating her daughter about her 'Dazed and white and shaken' state, confronts the girl with the source of her confusion and stress in a heartlessly destructive manner:

> Your feet were dancing, Alice,
> Seemed to dance on air,
> You looked a ghost or angel
> In the starlight there
>
> Your eyes were frosted starlight
> Your heart fire and snow
> Who was it said, 'I love you?'

Alice, overwhelmed by experience which she cannot comprehend by reason alone, and in which her emotions are too closely involved for her to be objective, finds no sympathy or advice from her mother, whose words read more as an accusation than as a display of parental concern. All

46. CS (1920), p.38 (for 'Apples and Water').
PG (1921), pp.13-4 (for 'The Pier-Glass').

that Alice can do at the conclusion of the poem is renew the appeal to her mother:

'Mother, let me go! '

In 'A Frosty Night' the ambivalence of love is suggested by the very structure of the poem where a series of opposites are balanced against one another in order to suggest the girl's dilemma. Alice's meeting with her lover, as imagined by her mother, took place when the moon 'Coldly gaped' :

Yet the birds seemed twittering
Through green boughs of June.

Graves has regarded the moon as a sinister force from the outset of his career. In Over the Brazier, there was a poem called 'I Hate the Moon', and in Fairies and Fusiliers, a work entitled 'The Cruel Moon'. It will be shown that the image of the moon as a hostile force appears at intervals throughout the poet's canon, and as the White Goddess mythology evolves it becomes an integral part thereof. Love's ambivalence is also hinted at when the mother says that Alice 'looked a ghost or angel', and that her 'heart was fire and snow'. Feelings and ideas that are normally opposed to one another blend, apparently beyond the laws of reason, in the experience of love.

The role of the adult as embittered interrogator is significant, for it is repeated in other poems of the period, and is an extension of the poet's sense of betrayal first seen in 'Faun' or 'The Next War'. The lessons of age seem to be wholly negative, and the mother's mocking tone may be interpreted as a defensive, self-protective pose. If youth is unable to absorb or comprehend the emotions it feels, age here is not shown as having learnt any greater capacity for understanding or coping with them. This is a reversal of the idea Wordsworth used in, say,'Resolution and Independence' where the young person seeks out and learns from the experience of an older member of the community. The reader realises that there is no resolution to the sense of unease provoked by the poem. Indeed, this is part of the writer's achievement in 'A Frosty Night': no artificial solution is imposed, but the problem of insecurity and unease is boldly stated.

The girl who is questioned in 'The Cupboard' is more defiant than Alice, and this poem culminates in her final unrepentant and challenging admission that the cupboard contains

> White clothes for an unborn baby, mother,
> But what's the truth to you?

The dismissal of her parent as at once inadequate to her needs and indifferent to truth shows that the unmarried but pregnant girl actively expects society, the attitudes of which are upheld by the mother, to offer her nothing except criticism. Michael Kirkham adds to this idea by saying that

> The mahogany cupboard with "its shining crystal handles" is an evocative symbol of tradition, against which by independently taking a lover and conceiving a child the daughter has rebelled.[47]

The girl's baby is a love-child, but this love has cost her the security and support of a society which is intolerant of such non-conformity. Once more, therefore, Graves confronts us with an insight into the simultaneous delights and pains of love.

'Apples and Water' presents another dialogue between a mother and daughter, in which the girl is warned by the disillusioned woman not to trust the soldiers who ask for refreshment as they march past. Unlike the blind prejudices of the adults in the previous two poems, this woman's attitudes and experience emerge as clearly related facts, and we become aware of how romantic love and innocence itself leave the individual vulnerable to exploitation that can have dire and lasting consequences. Although obviously in a different context, we know that the poet felt that his own youth had been subjected to violation and betrayal in an equally traumatic way.

'The Pier-Glass', a slightly later poem, contrasts the central character's guilt with her unashamed acceptance of responsibility for the murder she committed. The note of self-justification - which, it will be seen, is inconsistent with the rest of the poem - is sounded elsewhere in Graves's work of these years, most notably, perhaps, in 'Rocky Acres', where the whole strategy of the verse is to cow the reader

47. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.37.

by the violence of the words. 'The Pier-Glass' is a more complex poem, and if it is less unified than 'Rocky Acres', the nature of its failure shows the emotional dilemma Graves was facing.

It is a dramatic monologue telling the story of a haunted woman who is 'Drawn by a thread of time-sunk memory' to pay repeated visits to a long-deserted room in which, it appears, she once committed a murder. The use of an empty, abandoned room as an image for a remote or subconscious area of the imagination is a variation on the use of a house for the same purpose in 'Ghost Raddled', published in the previous volume, Country Sentiment.[48] The furnishings of the room are significant. The 'huge bed of state/Shrouded with rusty curtains drooped awry' is the main piece of furniture and, as becomes clearer at the end of the poem, is where the murder took place. An interesting parenthesis follows the introductory mention of the bed. It is described as

(A puppet theatre where malignant fancy
Peoples the wings with fear).

Since the bed is where the woman slept with her dead lover, her confused feelings on this may be deduced from the description of it as a 'puppet theatre'. We recognize the ideas of 'malignant fancy' and 'fear' from other poems in which Graves describes the ambiguous feelings of the lover. Puppet theatres, however, do not normally have such sinister associations. It is as though the poet, or, more accurately, the haunted woman cannot believe in the gravity or the reality of her offence when she looks at the scene, but is pursued by the memories associated with it. A further thought is that Punch and Judy are the best known characters in puppet theatre, and in their story Judy triumphs through violence. So too, it is a woman who has committed the act of violence in 'The Pier-Glass'.

'The ravelled bell-pull' which serves only to summon 'elder ghosts' from 'attic glooms above' provides another link with 'Ghost Raddled', where there is a reference to 'spirits in the web-hung room/ Up above the stable'. Finally there is the pier-glass itself:

... 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.

48. CS (1920), p.51.

This mirror confronts the onlooker with a truthful reflection which cannot be evaded. The nature of that reflection is anticipated by an accumulation of words - 'sullen', 'cracked', 'melancholy', 'pale' - which also constitute a comment on the beholder's personality. Faces that look at themselves for too long become ensnared, as Narcissus found, in their own introspection. One wonders if there is a pun intended in the title, 'The Pier-Glass'. Graves does use the word 'peer' to describe the woman's behaviour. To peer at something implies that the effort involved causes difficulty, and the haunted woman has lost a sense of perspective, an awareness of life outside and beyond her:

> The windows frame a prospect of cold skies
> Half-merged with sea, as at the first creation,
> Abstract, confusing welter.

Her looks are turned back in upon her own ghastly reflection. We remember Donne's statement that 'No man is an island' when, in one neat phrase, 'this island mystery', Graves captures precisely the woman's isolation and loss of contact with healthy, natural life. Her appeal is to the mirror, 'for Christ's love', to grant her any token, however slight, that somewhere there is 'True life, natural breath; not this phantasma'. All re-publications of the poem since 1927 have ended with these words, leaving the reader with the woman's desperate but unanswered appeal to the pier-glass. If the poem terminates at this point, it also leaves the nature of the crime much less explicit than in the 1921 version, though that is not a detrimental factor in itself. It is best to consider what the final section of the original poem adds before assessing the effect of the change.

Having made her plea to the mirror, the woman claims that she receives the requested token, and therefore knows that 'death prevails not yet'. The sign of hope - the sound of bees swarming 'in a close place/Pent up between this glass and the outer wall'-replaces the earlier void in which there was not even a 'wainscot rat/ Rasping a crust'. The bees are not only a promise of new life, but are also representative of an integrated community working together, and ruled by a clear code dictated by the queen whose 'bee-sergeants' show

'Slow approbation, quick dissatisfaction'. The fact that the noise of the bees is described as a 'Disquieting rhythm' suggests that they are not wholly reassuring to the woman, but they have the effect of forcing her

> To face again a problem strongly solved
> In life gone by, but now again proposed
> Out of due time for fresh deliberation.

She is compelled to give direct thought to the action which has resulted in her haunted state. Hereafter the poem becomes rather vague, and we are given a number of pieces rather than a complete story. The woman either posed or was confronted with

> A paltry question set on the elements
> Of love and the wronged lover's obligation,

and, as the injured party, she had to choose between killing and forgiving 'the Master'. Having thus reformulated the dilemma originally resolved by her decision to kill, the concluding lines make it clear that her choice would still be the same, and indeed she even hears the bees, the former symbols of life, humming a chorus of agreement.

It is evident that the tone of this final section differs from the previous parts of the poem, those which Graves has retained. There the mood was uncompromisingly gloomy and hopeless, whereas the deleted passage opens with a sudden turn away from bleakness. In the context, it is a scarcely credible change of direction and it certainly detracts from the effect of the earlier lines. For this reason alone, the revision was commendable; but there is another point to be considered. Having moved to an optimistic note at the start of the last section, the poem alters its course yet again as the woman is presented reaffirming her past action. The final lines share the tone of agression and self-justification, if not the power, of 'Rocky Acres'. Furthermore, as has been noted, the function of the bees changes dramatically, and from being harbingers of life they become supporters of death. Psychologically, it may be satisfying for the distressed mind to interpret events so as to justify the particular needs of the moment, but poetically it is unconvincing. This is the real reason why the last section of the original version of 'The Pier-Glass' is unsatisfactory. In terms of the personal history of Robert Graves, the 1921 version reveals an urgent need for hope and vindication, and it is interesting that

this was allowed to survive through the 1926 and 1927 volumes. As a poem, however, there is no doubt that Graves's emendation was beneficial.

Imperfect as it is, 'The Pier- Glass' remains a striking poem, confronting us with a powerful feeling of desolation that builds up through a series of concrete details in the first three paragraphs. It brings together the themes of haunting and unhappy love, and, despite the conclusion, shows the poet facing these problems with new determination, for the whole point of the pier-glass is that it will neither lie nor permit evasion. Only when the woman turns away from the mirror to the noise of the bees in their 'close place' can she escape from her haunted feelings and find self-justification for her action.

The writer's nervous state, which produced the sense of conflict underlying all these poems, was also helping to shape the poetic theory he evolved in the early 1920's. Although it may be hard to know the extent to which the theory is a direct result of his neurasthenia, and to what extent he arrived at it independently, the idea that emotional conflict within the writer is indispensible to true creativity must have offered some consolation to Graves's tormented mind. In 1922 he wrote that

> where poetry differs from other verse is by being essentially a solution to some pressing emotional problem and has always the oracular note.[49]

Also in On English Poetry we read that the poet

> learns in self-protection to take pen and paper and let the pen solve the hitherto insoluble problem which has caused the disturbance.[50]

This, at least, was the theory. In practice the solution was seldom as realistic as these statements might suggest. The contrived ending of 'The Pier-Glass' is one kind of failure, and the violent celebration of the craggy, comfortless landscape dominated by the buzzard in 'Rocky Acres' is, at best, a limited form of resolution and depends on the philosophy that attack is the best form of defence. The theme of the poet's haunting is pursued through other works such as 'After the Play' and 'Nebuchadnezzar's Fall', but in each case it is his impotence to arrive at a true resolution of the crisis that is most striking. One poem which has survived in all the collected editions is typical of this stage in

49. Graves, On English Poetry (1922), p.21.
50. Ibid., p.26.

Graves's career.

'Ghost Raddled' - called 'The Haunted House' since 1938 - gives an intense impression of the poet's nightmares.[51] The opening is dramatic, for the bard , described as a 'surly fellow', is ordered to sing, and instead of doing so the rest of the poem expounds his reasons for not obliging. Cast in this role, the poet appears as an interpreter of events and feelings, and yet also as a person who is outside or distinguished from the rest of the company. He regards his listeners as 'madmen' or, according to the revised version, 'fools', and he invites them to

> Choose from the clouded tales of wrong
> And terror I bring to you.

The nightmares are so horrifying that they waken 'Honest men sleeping'. This introduces an idea that recurs in other poems of the period: honesty offers no shield from the bad dreams, and the suggestion is that the speaker himself must be corrupt or guilty to be haunted and to terrify the upright as he does. A poem contemporary with 'Ghost Raddled' implies that the haunted man is an outlaw.[52]

The later change of title is appropriate, for a house is often used as an image of the mind, and thus the tormenting ghosts are made to live in the remote parts of the house: that is, the subconscious regions of the mind. There are references to 'spirits in the web-hung room/Up above the stable' and 'demons in the dry well/That cheep and mutter'. The mention of visions

> Of lust frightful, past belief,
> Lurking unforgotten

adds to the idea of the poet's guilt as well as reminding us of a familiar Gravesian phobia. In 1938 this line was revised, and spoke of 'lust filthy past belief', but the original reading has since been restored, and is perhaps less neurotic in its implications. The concluding stanza sounds a clear note of bitterness and, whether intentionally or not, communicates the decisive change brought about by the war in the young man who joined the army with immature and romantic ideas, and who now, five years later, sees things in a very different light:

51. CS (1920), p.51.
    CP (1938), p.3.
52. CS (1920), pp.40-1.

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

The interrogative ending signifies an awareness of deadlock. For the poet, December is blind not only because it is the end of the year, but also because it seems separated with equal finality from previous times of happiness and from any prospects of another spring. In such a situation the call for a song appears inappropriate and escapist, and 'Ghost Raddled' has the merit of rejecting evasions or false solutions of the problem. Indeed, from one point of view, the poem is meant to expose the irresponsibility of seeking easy aids to forgetfulness. The anger aroused in the poet may be taken as a reflection of the mounting social frustration and disillusionment felt by many of the demobbed soldiers as Lloyd George's 'land fit for heroes' failed to materialise. Thus, in 'Ghost Raddled' more than in most poems, Graves endeavoured to link his own mental state with a general condition in society, and, it may be added, the image of a house serves him equally well in both capacities.

As these poems belong to the period when Graves was making his first formal attempt to define a theory of poetry, they are important not only in their own right, but also as indicating the sources he used when formulating his 'Irregular Approach to the Psychology of This Art, from Evidence Mainly Subjective'. Whether or not he did best when he had least theory behind his subject remains to be assessed, but comment must first be made on his frequent adoption of ballad and nursery-rhyme forms, particularly in Country Sentiment. This may be seen as symptomatic of the poet's search for a plain style, and also of his wish, conscious or not, to write about simple, uninvolved feelings. In one poem, 'To E.M. - Ballad of a Nursery Rhyme', he argues that nursery rhymes are true community poetry, as natural as wild strawberries and, like them, sweeter than any cultivated variety.[53] He attacks modern verse and its writers for corrupting the old rhymes and turning them into sterile intellectual 'webs of ink'. The proposition is so oversimplified that it does not merit consideration except in so far as it represents the poet's general problem at the time. In Country Sentiment especially,

53. Ibid., pp.55-7.

Graves's use of these forms is negative when it leads to the false simplicity celebrated in 'Ballad of a Nursery Rhyme'. It is positive, however, when it enables him to convey a limited series of feelings and ideas in a disciplined and convincing way. Examples of this are 'Allie', 'Vain and Careless', and 'Apples and Water'. There Graves draws upon the strength of the nursery-rhyme and the ballad because his own themes are suitable to them. In Daniel Hoffman's imagined dialogue between Poet and Professor, the Poet makes a number of pertinent comments about Graves's enthusiasm for ballads during this period. He says:

> I can appreciate what Graves found in the ballads. Although he's thrown out the group-mind theory, it served him pretty well for a time in meeting a harsh creative problem... maybe he felt more painfully than others the isolating individualism of creative power. Perhaps he wanted to escape from his isolation, yet not deny the attractiveness for which it is the price. In the war, Graves found a closer cameraderie in the Regiment, facing death, than he had ever known at Charterhouse School where makers of verses were derided. And he found that his fellow soldiers were capable of being ballad poets like himself. That must have proved steadying through the rough years at the front. He's ever since been digging furiously into myths, folklore, oaths, nursery rhymes - all the proofs the popular mind has ever given that it can share the artist's shaping power.
>
> And the group-mind ballad theory helped Graves formulate an important principle in his own writing...in his own quirky way Graves was reacting against the excessive intrusion of personality into the art of the generation Pound satirized in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley'. The ballad has to be impersonal because it reflects the mind of a whole culture, and its view of life - stark, tragic, passionate - is greater than any comment an individual can make upon it.... In the '20's he was searching for traditions that corresponded to certain tensions of his own - and to their resolutions. You have to take into his sense of relation to England...Half Irish, half-German ,

> he was reared and schooled in England, yet, he says, it was in Wales - a country to which he had no ties of blood - that he found a personal peace. Well, in British balladry Graves found a literary tradition uniting the qualities of spirit he felt in himself and in his country. [54]

This is an appealing way to consider the interest Graves had in these forms, for it is sensitive to the need for considering both the poet's personal and his poetic problems. Certainly, with a man like Graves, the two cannot be divorced. Yet the fact remains that before he could come to terms with deeper and more emotionally demanding experiences, he had to find other forms with greater scope.

'The God Called Poetry' provides a further insight into the poet's view of his art and practice. [55] It carries an early version of an idea expounded in The White Goddess. One major difference is that the poetic deity is masculine, whereas the feminity of the muse is central to the later theory. The God is compared to Janus, having one face 'calm, benignant' and another 'grim and scowling'. This anticipates the duality and unpredictability of the White Goddess. One may speculate on the extent to which Graves's God reflects his feelings of instability and dislocation in 1920, and this again inevitably raises the vexed question of the impact of the poet's war experiences and his subsequent neurasthenia on his entire philosophy of poetry. Some of the details may have changed and the style has improved, but the basic characteristics of the God of Poetry described in the lines below are those we associate with the White Goddess. It is also significant that the poet is singled out as a specially privileged person, for here again is an idea which has persisted in Graves's thesis:

> Then speaking from his double head
> The glorious fearful monster said
> 'I am YES and I am NO,
> Black as pitch and white as snow,
> Love me, hate me, reconcile
> Hate with love, perfect with vile,
> So equal justice shall be done
> And life shared between moon and sun.
> Nature for you shall curse or smile:
> A poet you shall be, my son.'

54. Daniel Hoffman, Barbarous Knowledge (New York: 1967), pp.133-35.
55. CS (1920), pp.26-7.

It has been said that in the early 1920's Graves believed that emotional conflict was the starting point of poetry, and that poems themselves were therapeutic in effect, relieving the writer of his original crisis. Whether one takes this as no more than a convenient rationalization of his problem, the fact remains that Graves was still the victim of a nervous disorder, and was unsure how to come to terms with it. He tells us in his autobiography:

> I thought that perhaps I owed it to Nancy to go to a psychiatrist to be cured; yet I was not sure. Somehow I thought that the power of writing poetry, which was more important to me than anything else I did, would disappear if I allowed myself to get cured; my 'Pier-Glass' haunting would end and I would become merely a dull easy writer. It seemed to me less important to be well than to be a good poet. [56]

His mixed feelings emerge in 'The Gnat', a poem about which Graves later wrote with unwonted detail. [57] It is an important example because it shows the close relationship between his theory and practice of poetry. Briefly, the poem tells how a shepherd, Watkin by name, hears 'an inner voice/Calling "My creature, ho! be warned, be ready ! " ' and mistakenly takes this to refer to himself rather than to his dog, 'old bob-tail Prinny'. The shepherd's mind is tormented by a gnat which is

> Tunnelling gradually inwards, upwards,
> Heading for the flowery pastures of the brain.

This, we are told, is Watkin's 'due earnings of transgression', implying that in some unstated way he is a guilty person. The familiar idea of guilt is linked here with 'pride that outlawed his heart' and choked repentance in past times. The gnat so plagues the shepherd that he longs for death, his only worry being for Prinny who, he decides, must die with him, but do so by the hand of the minister. However, three times Watkin fails to see the minister, and on the next night the gnat,

> Pent-up within the skull, knew certainly,
> As a bird knows in the egg, his hour was come,

and drives the shepherd into a last frenzy during which he himself

56. GBTAT (1929), p.381.
57. PG (1921), pp.31-3.

kills his dog, simultaneously spewing the gnat from his mouth and purging his madness. Watkin is finally presented, no longer a shepherd, but a mere labourer, living a desolate and fruitless old age, irretrievably detached from even the memory of his past existence:

> Labourer Watkin delves in the wet fields.
> Did an old shepherd die that night with Prinny,
> Die weeping with his head on the outraged corpse?
> Oh, he's forgotten. A dead dream, a cloud.
> Labourer Watkin delves, drowsily, numbly,
> His harsh spade grates among the buried stones.

His new life may be easier in some respects, but it is characterised by the inertia and sterility so aptly suggested in the last two lines.

Although the poem as a whole is undistinguished, and has not been reprinted since 1927, Graves's comments on it in The Meaning Of Dreams (1924) give an insight into the working of his creative faculty. He begins by describing how two separate stories fused together to provide the basis for the poem, an occurrence which he had already detailed elsewhere in connection with 'In the Wilderness'.[58] He wrote:

> The story about the Gnat and Titus is an old Jewish legend; the story about the shepherd is a true one, from St. Ives in Cambridgeshire, and hardly altered. The old man was under the delusion that he had something alive inside his head hurting him, as a punishment for wrong done, and the Gnat was a convenient way for me to represent this delusion. The rest of the story is left unaltered except that it was not a minister he wanted to kill his dog, but a farmer; and whether or not in the day that the shepherd killed his dog and madness thereupon left him, he did have the delusion of the Gnat flying out through his mouth, I do not know, but certainly he was raving mad at the time. When I wrote the poem, which no longer affects me strongly when I read it, I remember having been in a most agonised state of mind for which I was quite unable to account, except that I felt an immense sympathy with the shepherd.[59]

58. This is discussed in Chapter Two, pp.173-77.
59. Graves, The Meaning of Dreams (1924), pp.162-63.

The emphasis on the curative or, at least, palliative power of poetry for the writer is evident, but it was also part of Graves's claim in On English Poetry that the poet acts as a kind of witch-doctor for his whole tribe. His work not only transforms his own emotional crisis into dream symbolism, but has the

> power of homeopathically healing other men's minds similarly troubled, by presenting them under the spell of hypnosis with an allegorical solution of the trouble... Apparently on a recognition of this aspect of poetry the Greeks founded their splendid emblem of its power - the polished shield of Perseus that mirrored the Gorgon's head with no harmful effect and allowed the hero to behead her at his ease.[60]

What then were the precise elements in the crisis which led to Graves writing 'The Gnat', how effectively do they communicate themselves to us, and how much of a 'cure' does the poem offer? Referring to it in 1924, he said:

> In waking life I decided that at all costs I must get cured; in the dream-life, or rather the mood of poetic inspiration, the beaten side asserted itself. 'The Gnat' is an assertion that to be rid of the gnat (shell-shock) means killing the sheep dog (poetry) and when the sheep dog is dead, the shepherd ceases to be a shepherd and becomes a labourer; that is, I would have to give up being a shepherd and become a labourer; in fact, I would have to give up being a poet and become a school-master or a bank-clerk. The minister to whom the shepherd could not make up his mind to go was, in this case, the psychologist.[61]

It is easy to see why Graves identified sympathetically with the shepherd, but the poem cannot be said to cure anything. At best, it symbolises the poet's fears as he ponders the advisability of seeking medical help, and so may be described as speculative. In the event, the treatment Graves received from Dr. Rivers did not destroy his creative powers, and he came to realise that when his conflict ended with the discovery of the true cause of his distress, this merely

60. Graves, On English Poetry (1922), pp.84-5.
61. Graves, The Meaning of Dreams (1924), p.164.

changed, but did not stop, either his dreams or his writing.[62] The fact that the poem was dropped from collected editions after 1927 suggests that the poet grew to recognise its essentially passing significance and its lack of real resolution. So too, as Graves became increasingly alienated from the mainstream of English life during the 'twenties, the early emphasis on poetry as a 'complete dispensary of medicine for the more common mental disorders' developed into a more closely defined and less vulgarised attitude in which the poet is seen as the servant of no man.[63] Ultimately, of course, he is presented as the servant of only one woman, the muse, or White Goddess.

For the moment, let us consider two other poems, both published in Whipperginny, which Graves annotated with the deliberate aim of demonstrating his aesthetic theory in practice. The first of these, 'The General Elliott', is a cheerful ballad which was reprinted with only minor alterations up until the 1965 Collected Poems, when it was dropped.[64] Graves chose this poem as the subject for a hypothetical reply to an American colonel who questioned its factual accuracy.[65] He begins by stating an important basic fact, that

> the poet very seldom writes about what he is observing at the moment. Usually a poem that has been for a long time maturing unsuspected in the unconscious mind, is brought to birth by an outside shock, often quite a trivial one, but one which - as midwives would say - leaves a distinct and peculiar birthmark on the child.

Initially, therefore, the poem is not a calculated production, but generates itself from a variety of factors at work in the poet's subconscious mind. As a result, he is left with the task of dismantling or retracing the constituent elements after the original composition has taken place, and this Graves endeavours to do. He remembers seeing an inn at Hinksey called 'The General Elliott', but has no recollection of the picture which is the subject of the poem. A man working in the garden of the inn told him that he did not know who Elliott was, but 'he reckoned he was a fine soldier and killed somewhere long ago in a big battle'. The poem itself came to Graves in its first form when he happened to pass the inn some months later, and he cites the following verse:

62. Ibid., p.165.
63. Graves, On English Poetry (1922), p.85.
64. W (1923), pp.18-9.
65. Graves, On English Poetry (1922), pp.57-61.

Was it Schellenberg, General Elliott,
Or Minden or Waterloo
Where the bullet struck your shoulder knot,
And the sabre shore your arm,
And the bayonet ran you through?

A poem developed from this, but it left the writer dissatisfied even after five drafts, and so he recast it in a different style which enabled him to bring it to its final form. At this point Graves offers his analysis of the 'conflicting emotions reconciled in the poem', and it is convenient to quote his own words:

> There appear to be more than one set of conflicting emotions reconciled in this poem. In the false start I referred to, the 1A idea was not properly balanced by 1B and 1C, which necessitated reconstruction of the whole scheme; tinkering wouldn't answer. I analyse the final version as follows:-
> 1A Admiration for a real old fashioned General beloved by his whole division, killed in France (1915) while trying to make a broken regiment return to the attack. He was directing operations from the front line, an unusual place for a divisional commander in modern warfare.
>
> B Disgust for the incompetence and folly of several other generals under whom I served - their ambition and jealousy, their recklessness of the lives of others.
>
> C Affection, poised between scorn and admiration, for an extraordinary thick-headed, kind-hearted militia Colonel, who was fond enough of the bottle, and in private life a big farmer. He was very ignorant of military matters but somehow got through his job surprisingly well.
> 2A My hope of settling down to a real country life in the sort of surroundings that the two Hinksey's afford, sick of nearly five years soldiering. It occurred to me that the inn must have been founded by an old soldier who felt much as I did then. Possibly General Elliott himself, when he was dying, had longed to be back in these very parts with his pipe and glass and a view of the orchard. It would have been a kind thought to paint

a sign board of him so, like one I saw once (was it in Somerset or Dorset?) - The Jolly Drinker and not like the usual grim, military scowl of General Wellington's and General Wolfe's.

B I ought to have known who Elliott was because I used once to pride myself as an authority on military history. The names of Schellenberg, Minden, Malplaquet, The Boyne (although only the two middle battles appear on the colours as battle honours) are imperishable glories for the Royal Welch Fusilier. And the finest Colonel this regiment ever had, Ellis, was killed at Waterloo; he had apparently on his own initiative moved his battalion from the reserves into a gap in the front line.

3A My own faith in the excellent qualities of our national beverage.

B A warning inscription on a tomb at Winchester over a private soldier who died of drink. But his comrades had added a couplet - "An honest soldier ne'er shall be forgot, Whether he died by musket or by pot ! "

There are all sorts of other sentiments mixed up, which still elude me, but this seems enough for an answer.

The astonishing thing is that Graves can detect so many ideas at work in himself, influencing the composition of a poem which seems as straightforward in meaning and style as 'The General Elliott'. In all honesty it must be said that had the poet not given such an explicit account, no reader could have traced all, or even many, of these factors for himself. This raises an important question about Graves's own claims for poetry in the early 'twenties. In the passage quoted above, he maintained that the poem reconciles 'more than one set of conflicting emotions', and while one may accept that Graves achieved this reconciliation for himself, it is harder to see that the homeopathic healing function is equally fulfilled. Some may say that this claim is too grandiose for a poem like 'The General Elliott', but Graves himself makes no such distinction, and he chose the poem to illustrate the reconciliation of conflicting emotions. As the decade went on he gave less emphasis to the social and remedial role of poetry and it may be, perhaps, that in this earlier period he attempted

to match theory and practice with greater conviction than accuracy.

Psychology was for Graves in his youth what myth came to be for him in his maturity. His first study of poetry was dedicated to T.E. Lawrence and the psychologist, W.H.R. Rivers. Rivers was particularly interested in dream-interpretation, and many of his ideas appealed to the poet and encouraged certain of his poetic theories. Indeed, Graves opened a chapter on 'Secondary Elaboration' in his book, Poetic Unreason, with a long quotation from Rivers which argues that the images of a poem like those of a dream, reveal the poet's mental conflicts and that the latent content is likely to differ from the outward sense.[66] Moreover, he adds that the poem we read is unlikely to be the product of immediate creative activity, but will have been carefully revised by the writer in a process which he likens to Freud's notion of the secondary elaboration of a dream, and which serves to obscure the conflicts in the poet's mind. It is easy to see the similarity between this hypothesis and that put forward by Graves. In Poetic Unreason we find a detailed explanation of how 'The Bedpost', described in the introduction to Whipperginny as 'bankrupt stock of 1918', underwent 'structural repair'.[67]

The poem, originally called 'Betsy', was written in 1918 when Graves had been declared unfit for service in France after being severely wounded and shell-shocked, but feared that things were so bad that he would be forced to return to his battalion. In addition, he had recently married, and his wife was pregnant, so especially at that point in time he felt a particular abhorrence at the prospect of being killed. The early version of the poem reads as follows:

Sleepy Betsy from her pillow
Sees the shadow tall
Of her mother's wooden bedpost
Flung upon the wall.

Now this grave and kindly warrior
With his small round head
Tells her stories of old battles
As she lies in bed

66. Graves, Poetic Unreason (1925), pp.99-100.
67. Ibid., pp.104-110.

How the Emperor and the Farmer
Fighting knee to knee,
Broke their swords but whirled the scabbards
Till they gained the sea.

How the sons of Ehud Vigo
Whom the ogre slew,
Caught and skinned their father's murderer
Old Cro-bar-cru.

How two brothers Will and Abel
Fought the giant Gog,
Threw him into Stony Cataract
In the land of Og.

How a girl called Ann Clarissa
Fell in love with Will,
And went with him to the Witches' Larder
Over Hoo Hill

How Gog's wife encountered Abel
Whom she hated most,
Stole away his arms and armour,
Turned him to a post.

But Betsy likes the bloodier stories,
Clang and clash of fight;
And Abel wanes with the spent candle
"Good-night; Good-night."

The contrast here between the youth and innocence of the child, and the violent stories which she enjoys hearing is obvious. Graves expands this and gives it specific application by saying that the child represents his hope for the future whereas the stories represent the fact that he would return to fight if necessary. His gloss on Cro-bar-Cru and Gog is useful:

> Cro-bar-Cru represents a phrase from a poem about a wicked landlord evicting a hapless widow from a cottage with the help of his Crowbar Crew. I thought as a child that Cro-bar-Cru was a giant. Gog, the Guildhall giant, was mixed in my mind with the warlike Og, who had the iron bedstead nine cubits long.

It is worth following these comments with an observation made by W.H.R. Rivers in his Conflict and Dream. He writes that

> the special character of the dream is not due, as Freud supposes, to the activity of a process of censorship leading to a distortion of the real meaning of the dream, but is the result of the fact that the dream depends on the coming into activity in sleep of early modes of mental functioning. I have regarded the symbolization and dramatization of the dream as processes characteristic of childhood and youth, which come into activity in sleep, because more recent modes of mental functioning have passed into abeyance in sleep, with the consequent removal of the control which in the waking life they normally exert on older activities.[68]

Since Graves accepted that the production of dream and poetry were closely comparable, it is interesting to find that childhood impressions and misunderstandings emerged in the poem by the adult. What we cannot tell is whether Graves deliberately set out to include these eccentricities. He himself says:

> In this poem one part of me, the Jekyll, had intended to write a nursery poem for the child who was going to be born, and was refusing to think about anything else. The other, the Hyde, more interested in the preservation of life and love, was dominating the Jekyll with a commentary on the folly of war.

In 1921, when the world was still torn by war in several countries, and after reading of a plan to turn a neighbouring house into a centre to develop poison gases, Graves re-wrote his poem, which he now called 'The Bedpost' :

> Sleepy Betsy from her pillow
> Sees the post and ball
> Of her sister's wooden bedstead
> Shadowed on the wall.
>
> Now this grave young warrior standing
> With uncovered head,
> Tells her stories of old battles,
> As she lies in bed.

68. W.H.R. Rivers, Conflict and Dream (1923), pp.96-7.

How the Emperor and the Farmer
Fighting knee to knee,
Broke their swords but whirled their scabbards
Till they gained the sea.

How the ruler of that shore
Foully broke his oath;
Gave them beds in his sea cavern,
Then stabbed them both.

How the daughters of the Emperor,
Diving boldly through,
Caught and killed their father's murderer,
Old Cro-bar-cru.

How the Farmer's sturdy sons
Fought the giant Gog,
Threwhim into Stony Cataract
In the land of Og.

Will and Abel were their names,
Though they went by others;
He could tell ten thousand stories
Of those lusty brothers.

How the Emperor's eldest daughter
Fell in love with Will
And went with him to the Court of Venus
Over Hoo Hill.

How Gog's wife encountered Abel,
Whom she hated most,
Stole away his arms and helmet,
Turned him to a post.

As a post he shall be rooted
For yet many years,
Until a maiden shall release him
With a fall of tears.

But Betsy like the bloodier stories,
Clang and clash of fight;
And Abel wanes with the spent candle,
"Sweetheart, goodnight ! "

The emphasis of the story has changed and the child now lies in the shadow of her sister's rather than her mother's bedpost. This shadow is'a sexual symbol which the child is not yet physically prepared to recognize, but when a certain time comes, Abel will be released from the spell'. At the moment, just as Betsy prefers gruesome stories to those dealing with love, so too the world prefers the cross as a symbol of military achievement rather than as a symbol of Christ's love and non-violence. Graves adds three more factors which he considers relevant to the revision of the poem. He feared that his own daughter, represented by Betsy, had been nervously distressed by her nurse who was in a neurotic condition as a result of war experiences, and he was concerned for the little girl's future. The poet's own neurasthenia was still serious, and he was contemplating psychoanalysis as a means of relief, but, as has been mentioned, he dreaded that a cure for his neurosis might also kill his poetic gifts. Finally, Graves started his revision of the poem after some of his friends had accused him of 'nursery sentimentality', and he maintains that this weakness is resolved by the new balance with a contrary attitude, 'the cynical Freudian view of childhood'. The total effect of these influences is summed up as follows:

> the child in this version, as I wish to make plain, emblemizes myself in one sense and an actual child in another, with Abel for psychotherapy; and this imagery is superimposed on, but does not contradict, the former version - where the child stands for the hope of a child and family life, on the one hand, and for the European war-mind on the other, and where Abel is the spirit of peace and toleration, with a vague Christian colouring.

Here,then, are the emotional conflicts deemed essential for any poem, but it is questionable whether, without the commentary, readers of the early version would detect in it 'a commentary on the folly of war', or would be impressed by the subsequent identification of the poet with Betsy and of Abel with a psychotherapist. More recently, asked by students about the meaning of his poems, Graves replied: 'It says exactly what it means, and if you can tell me where it stops being

comprehensible, I shall be sincerely grateful.' [69] Although 'The Bedpost' is not incomprehensible in the ordinary sense of that word, it does not communicate the subtleties of thought described in the prose accounts.

As with 'The General Elliott', this indicates a major difficulty with psychological interpretations of poetry - namely, that our dependence upon the writer's case histories may come to outweigh our interest in the poems themselves. Then again, the assumption is that the poet himself is aware of every relevant force at work in his mind, and can apportion each one its due significance. Clearly it is an assumption of dubious validity - for example, in The Scholar-Critic, F.W. Bateson adds to the information given by Graves in his commentary on 'The General Elliott' - but it leads us towards the conclusion that the poet must be a psychologist, or perhaps psychologists should be poets. [70] Rivers poses this dilemma in the extract quoted by Graves:

> Just as I believe that a really satisfactory analysis of a dream is only possible to the dreamer himself or to one who knows the conflicts and experiences of the dreamer in a most unusual way, so I believe that only when poets and other artists have set to work to analyse the products of their artistry can we expect to understand the real mechanism of the artistic production. [71]

The question whether poets are the only fit commentators on poetry is an old one, and Graves himself would almost certainly answer in the affirmative. Throughout his career he has assumed the right to make free interpretations of the work of other poets, sometimes with great shrewdness - for example, the analysis of a Shakespeare sonnet, included in The Common Asphodel, but on other occasions, such as his Clark Lecture on Yeats, Eliot, Auden and Dylan Thomas, with at best very rough justice. While one can perhaps accept that a fellow poet or artist may have the most interesting and pertinent comments to make about the creative process, the recklessness of some of Graves's own criticism is fair evidence that the poet is not necessarily the best critic.

Before concluding this part of the discussion, it seems right to add a note of qualification to the preceding argument. Graves's

69. Graves, Poetic Craft and Principle (1967), p.21.
70. F.W. Bateson, The Scholar-Critic (1972), pp.110-15.
71. Rivers, Conflict and Dream (1923), pp.148-49 and Graves, Poetic Unreason (1925), p.100.

choice of 'The General Elliott' and 'The Bedpost' for detailed analysis demonstrates the operation of his own mind in creating a poem. In the end, however, it is the published versions which count, and if the poet has done his job properly , the various tensions of earlier, more undisciplined drafts will have been resolved. Thus, 'The Bedpost' is a better poem than 'Betsy' because it binds formerly disjointed parts of the story in a more professional manner, quite apart from the additional complexity that it accrues on the way. Biographical evidence, awareness of literary allusions, and any other information, psychological or otherwise, may aid our understanding, but ultimately the poem must speak for itself, as Graves later said, and the reader's task is to bring a sympathetic imagination to bear on the subject. The commentaries on 'The General Elliott' and 'The Bedpost' are constructive insights into poetic method, but they should not become substitutes for the poems themselves, or even assume equality of importance with them. This is the decisive point which must not be neglected.

Although both 'The General Elliott' and 'The Bedpost' were first published in Whipperginny, they are not altogether typical of the mood of that volume, for as Graves explained in an introductory note, his attitudes towards his art, his public and his own experience were altering. By 1923 he was beginning to write 'less lyrical pieces', poems in which he adopted a more taut,ironic, and even abrasive style. He described his work of 1918 as being dominated by 'the desire to escape from a painful war neurosis into an Arcadia of amatory fancy'.[72] But it is notable that while Graves was particularly dismissive of poetry from the Country Sentiment period, The Pier-Glass - the collection immediately preceding Whipperginny - received more sympathetic treatment from its writer. He mentions with favour that there 'the prevailing mood... is aggressive and disciplinary, under the stress of the same neurosis, rather than escapist'. The adjectives are well-chosen if we think of poems such as 'The Gnat', the first half of the title poem, 'Down', and 'Return', and we might expect aggression and discipline to characterise his new volume. The introduction tells us that:

72. W (1923), p.v.

> Whipperginny for a while continues so, but in most of the later pieces will be found evidence of greater detachment in the poet and the appearance of a new series of problems in religion, psychology and philosophy,no less exacting than their predecessors, but, it may be said, of less emotional intensity.

It is less the reference to new themes and problems than the claim for greater detachment and reduced emotional intensity which commands our attention. The poet's involvement and the need for emotional intensity were fundamental points in On English Poetry. Indeed, in that book Graves speculates why a poet may stop writing 'true' poems, and suggests two possibilities. Perhaps his clash of emotions is transmuted into a calmer state of meditation on philosophic paradox which poetry, being sensuous and passionate, is ill-suited to express. Otherwise, because the conflict of the poet's sub-personalities 'has been finally settled, the victors dictate to him and therefore he writes 'in legal prose or (from habit) in verse'. [73] The features which Graves specified as the distinguishing marks of the later poems in Whipperginny are thus truly new, and his conclusion to the author's note precludes any query on this change of direction with the sophisticated irony one associates with the mature poet:

> 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".

The implication here, that the poet will not be held in servitude however strong the appeals, grew steadily in importance for Graves throughout the 'twenties.

Poetry for him has always been a source of truth, a special way of reaching moral insights. This was so in an early poem like 'Goliath and David', and equally true in pieces such as 'Vain and Careless' and 'Apples and Water'. Whipperginny marks the start of a phase in Graves's development when he voiced his increasing disillusionment

73. Graves, On English Poetry (1922), pp.36-7.

with society around him and its values. As he put it in his foreword to the Collected Poems (1938), 'the discrepancy between romantic and poetic values becomes painfully felt; and the spell of poetry is seen as a protection against the death-curse in which humanity seems entailed'.[74] The title-poem, 'Whipperginny', is interesting in the light of this comment. It is written in what may be described as a metaphysical style, consisting of an extended comparison between the nature and value of card games and of poetry. The word 'Whipperginny' is, amongst other things, the name of an ancient card game, as the epigraph tells us. Graves begins by establishing the idea that cards are frequently played 'when Time with cruelty runs'.[75] They provide a means of distraction in painful predicaments, and permit men to run the gauntlet of dangerous situations in perfect safety:

> On fairy earth we tread,
> No present problems vex
> Where man's four humours fade to suits,
> With red and black for sex.
>
> Where phantom gains accrue
> By tricks instead of cash,
> Where pasteboard federacies of Powers
> In battles-royal clash.

One is, of course, reminded of Pope's account of the card game in 'The Rape of the Lock', where he too realized how much depended upon the outcome of an intensely serious form of play. Graves is not concerned with the social and moral implications of the game, but with defining the personal value of poetry to him. The card game is to be understood

> As type of mirth-abstracted joy,
> Calm terror, noiseless rage.

He has chosen an obsolete game because it is

> Cipher remote enough to stand
> As namesake for my rhyme,
>
> A game to play apart
> When all but crushed with care.

The poet is no longer preoccupied with the idea of the general curative value of his work. On the contrary, he likens it to an ancient and

74. CP (1938), p.xiii.
75. W (1923), p.1.

scarcely known game, regarding it as a means of imposing discipline upon personal difficulties so that he can examine them in a more detached way. This would appear to be a solitary activity and a last resort in the face of despair. Cards and, by implication, poetry sublimate tensions and problems, making them more tolerable, but they do not resolve them. This is escapism, as the contrast between 'fairy earth' induced by cards or poetry, and the 'present problems' makes clear. One of the saving graces of 'Whipperginny' is that Graves himself is aware that its viewpoint is evasive. This awareness is directly related to his heightened sense of paradox and irony which recurs in some of the later poems in the volume. For the moment, the paradox of poetry is that while it derives from situations of crisis, it is impotent to resolve them. This is evident in works such as 'Song of Contrariety', 'Children of Darkness' and 'A History of Peace'.[76] In the latter two works, paradox is accompanied by increasing bitterness and disillusionment. The harsh satirical tone is another new departure, though not entirely unprecedented, as 'Rocky Acres' shows.

In 'The Turn of a Page' Graves directs his satire against the reader, simultaneously asserting his own determination to write what he pleases.[77]

> 'He suddenly', the page read as it turned,
> 'Died'.
>
> The indignant eye discerned
> No sense, "Goodpage, turn back", it cried...

But the poet insists on the truth of the story as told in the book, and also on the necessity for the reader to accept what he finds there. The irony of the story is increased, firstly because the reader has just been informed a few pages earlier that 'Him she loved' and 'He alone of men', yet now the hopes that these words created in the imagination are betrayed by the man's death. The second part of the irony comes when the reader, still restless and dissatisfied, looks ahead, only to discover again the words 'Him she loved' and 'He alone of men'. He asks who this 'second He' can be who has

> Confused the plan; the book spoke sternly then,
> 'Read page by page and see! '

This technique of putting the reader firmly in his place and insisting

76. Ibid., p.5; p.14; p.39.
77. Ibid., p.67.

on his subservience to the writer is reiterated with a different emphasis in Ten Poems More where 'To the Reader Over My Shoulder' was published.[78] There the reader is rejected as a force influencing the style and content of the writing:

> For you in strutting, you in sycophancy
> Have played too long this other self of me,
> Doubling the part of judge and patron
> With that of creaking grindstone to my wit.
> Know me, have done: I am a clean spirit
> And you for ever flesh. Have done

As Michael Kirkham says, here

> poetry is an act of purification; by isolating himself from the impurity of contact with what is not-self the poet releases himself from the determinations of the flesh and existence in time.[79]

It is worth adding that later Graves also turned his satire against the self-seeking poet whose eye is always fixed upon his public image:

> And the punishment is known:
> To be found fully ancestral,
> To be cast in bronze for a city square,
> To dribble green in times of rain
> And stain the pedestal.[80]

The sense, reinforced by the rhythms of these lines, conveys a clear moral judgment which is made without rancour, whereas in 'The Turn of a Page' the tone is haughty and contemptuous, and Graves allows no concession to good humour. It is significant that 'To Evoke Posterity' comes fifteen years after 'The Turn of a Page' and eight years after 'To the Reader Over My Shoulder'. Increasing confidence in himself and in his poetic ideas seems to have enabled Graves to moderate his bitter tone.

However, two poems demonstrate the positive qualities deriving from the greater detachment and reduction in emotional intensity mentioned in the introduction to Whipperginny. 'The Bowl and Rim' begins with the theme of religious conflict between a friar and a rabbi, but proceeds to show how, 'Linked by their ankles in one cell', these traditional enemies develop mutual tolerance.[81] Their enmity may be taken as symbolic of the conflicting elements in the poet's mind, and their discovery and acceptance of unity between the bowl and its

78. TPM (Paris: 1930), p.1.
79. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.114.
80. CP (1938), p.147.
81. W (1923), pp.64-5.

rim represents for Graves a new stage in his own psychological recovery from the war. A concern for tolerance replaces the interest in conflict which was the keynote of poems like 'The Pier-Glass', 'A Frosty Night' and 'Ghost Raddled', as well as forming the basis of the theory in On English Poetry and Poetic Unreason.

As with 'The Turn of a Page', 'The Lord Chamberlain Tells of a Famous Meeting', one of the best poems in Whipperginny, is written from a deliberately anti-romantic standpoint.[82] In it Graves adopts the persona of the Lord Chamberlain who is the authentic reporter of a significant event. This is not a new pose for him to take , 'Goliath and David' being the most notable previous instance where Graves claimed to be 'the true historian of that fight'. The Lord Chamberlain maintains that the unofficial meeting between East and West, both of whom were disguised, 'In the main camp of the Middle Kingdom's army', was an occasion of the greatest restraint, dignity and self-discipline. They remained unrecognized save by each other and by him, and throughout he urges the validity of his account by insisting on his direct observation of the meeting. 'I was there myself, I say, seeing everything.' The anti-romanticism lies in the refutation of any embroidered versions of the story, but much of the richness of the poem occurs in the Lord Chamberlain's elaborate accounts of what did not happen. For example, he says:

> Pay no heed to those vagabond dramatists
> Who, to present this meeting on the stage,
> Would make my Prince, stealthily drawing out
> A golden quill and stabbing his arm for blood,
> Scratch on a vellum slip some hasty sentence
> And pass it under the table: which West signs
> With his blood, so the treaty's made between them
> All unobserved and two far nations wedded
> While enemy soldiers loll, yawning, around.

After each of these colourful digressions we are returned to the staid voice of the chamberlain himself, assuring us of his good authority, and preventing any hint of sensationalism. At the same time, he does not belittle the significance of the meeting. On the contrary, he describes it as the 'noblest' sight he has witnessed, and

82. Ibid., pp.44-7.

he deeply respects the 'silent understanding and restraint' of these men at a time when

> ... each knew well that this chance meeting stood
> For turning movement of world history.
> And I? I trembled, knowing these things must be.

As in 'The Bowl and Rim', Graves shows a new interest in tolerance. The opposing rulers, who may be taken in part as further representatives of the conflicting elements in the poet's mind, have met on neutral territory, and it is the fact that such a dignified encounter is possible in the circumstances which is impressed upon us. Michael Kirkham questions whether what he calls this 'aristocratic pose deliberately assumed, perhaps ironically, for the occasion' is 'a genuine, viable alternative to emotional intensity'.[83] One might reply that in comparison with a poem like 'Richard Roe and John Doe', where the poet's involvement in Roe's suffering makes it painful to read, Graves has written a work distinguished by his complete control of the tone. As in 'The Bowl and Rim', he insists on the need for unadorned truth. Furthermore, in both cases the exploration is conducted without a lapse into the kind of bitterness apparent elsewhere in varying degrees in this volume. It is, as J.M. Cohen has noted, hard to see why Graves has never republished this poem since 1927, for it has a subtlety and elegance which reveal themselves with repeated reading.[84]

The introduction to Whipperginny indicates that even at the time of its publication Graves recognised it as a transitional collection. One cannot seriously dispute this fact, but it is nevertheless a book with particular interest for the student of his poetry. We have seen how Graves used 'The General Elliott' and 'The Bed-Post' to illustrate his early speculations on poetic theory, and although there is no formal advance in his aesthetic other than that suggested in the introduction, the poet's increased sensitivity to the paradoxes and ironies of experience, and his new insistence on the need to establish truth and challenge platitude, are important signposts for the future.

The Feather Bed (1923) was Graves's next publication, and with one exception, it shows little development in the beliefs stated in Whipperginny. The exception, however, is important. Unhappiness and disappointment in love and religious scepticism plague the man whose

83. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.69.
84. Cohen, Robert Graves (1960), pp.34-5.

dramatic monologue forms the core of the poem, but as he sinks into sleep at the end, there is an epilogue in which the Morning Star addresses him and offers him a vision of harmony and reconcilation:

> Lucifer, Lucifer am I, millstone-crushed
> Between conflicting powers of doubleness,
> By envious night lost in her myriad more
> Counterfeit glints, in day-time quite overwhelmed
> By tyrant blazing of the warrior sun.
> Yet some, my prophets who at midnight held me
> Fixedly framed in their observant glass,
> By daylight also, sinking well shafts deep
> For water and for coolness of pure thought
> Gaze up and far above them see me shining
> Me, single natured, without gender, one
> The only spark of Godhead unresolved. [85]

He pays no heed, however, and through his dreams the former nightmares return to haunt him. 'The Feather Bed' is, therefore, inconclusive from the point of view of the unhappy lover, but in a wider sense the words of the Morning Star open up a whole new dimension of morality, and this is one of the vital features of both the title poem and its 'Introductory Letter to John Ransom (sic), the American poet'.

In the letter Graves said that 'the Morning Star theme is an interpolation by the outside Orator to stabilize the drama which without some such solution comes dangerously near a manifesto of atheism'. [86] From here he goes on to summarize his belief in the Old and New Testaments as 'a record of the progressive understanding of God throughout the ages by a single representative race, the Jews', and to explain the part that Lucifer holds in the scheme as he envisages it. The relevance of this three-part theory of man's developing moral and spiritual awareness is not restricted to 'The Feather Bed'. It also coincides with Graves's changing view of his own neurasthenia. In the beginning 'there is God the creator of the race of man, but of man still animal of the animals, whose daughters the sons of Adam found fair'. This primitive, pre-Christian God Graves calls Saturn, and one recalls poems such as 'Raising the Stone' [87] and 'Rocky Acres'. More specifically, 'Outlaws' described the 'Old gods almost dead, malign', giving a clear impression of a world without moral standards, ruled only by the driving force of

85. FB (Richmond: 1923), p.27.
86. Ibid., p.6.
87. PG (1921), p.25.

instinct. Thus, in terms of 'The Feather Bed', the 'black monolith' of the signpost in the prologue with its unhelpful legend picks up verbal and emotional associations that have antecedents.

Saturn's successor in Graves's theory is Jehovah. He writes that

> the old heritage of self-seeking instinct, in conflict with a new principle of social order found necessary for the further survival of the race, split the primitive idea of God into two, the ideas of Good and Evil, Good being the approval by the social mind of those non-conscious workings of the body which further its aims, Evil being the condemnation of the old Adam inclinations which run counter to it. [88]

Guilt, as we know was an important part of the poet's reaction to his neurasthenia. He felt his heart scalded by an unknown 'ancestral shame' in 'Reproach', [89] and the overwhelming need for self-justification in 'The Pier-Glass' has been illustrated. In these poems Graves was divided against himself.

However, when one thinks of 'The Stake' [90] or 'The Bowl and Rim' one realises that they have another perspective, and this corresponds with the third view of God, or Lucifer as Graves now designates him:

> As the spirit of reconciliation, Lucifer puts out of date the negative virtue of Good fighting with Evil, and proposes an Absolute Good which we can now conceive of as Peace. The doctrine of mutual responsibility for error, and of mutual respect between individuals, sex, classes, groups, and nations, a higher conception than the eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth doctrine of Jehovah, is Lucifer's. [91]

This willingness to accept without judging, accompanied by a sense of the limitations of so-called truth and history carries on the trait that emerged in the later poems in Whipperginny, and is even more central in Mock Beggar Hall. The fact that the sleeper in 'The Feather Bed' remains oblivious to the song of the Morning Star indicates that his awareness, and indeed man's awareness, of God in this aspect is still embryonic. Many years afterwards Graves spoke of the Black Goddess, and in this early vision of Lucifer there seems to be a definite forerunner of her, for in the later work we are told,

88. FB (1923), pp.6-7.
89. PG (1921), p.17.
90. Ibid., p.11.
91. FB (1923), p.7.

> She promises a new pacific bond between men and women, corresponding to a final reality of love, in which the patriarchal marriage bond will fade away. Unlike Vesta, the Black Goddess has experienced good and evil, love and hate, truth and falsehood in the person of her sister; but chooses what is good: rejecting serpent-love and corpse flesh. Faithful as Vesta, gay and adventurous as the White Goddess, she will lead men back to that sure instinct of love which he long ago forfeited by intellectual pride.[92]

If there is much in the White Goddess myth that reformulates and expands ideas held by Graves long before, now it appears that a similar link exists between Lucifer and the Black Goddess.

Michael Kirkham has aruged that the three-stage development of man's moral awareness may also be paralleled by three different attitudes in his love poems towards male-female relationships, and undoubtedly this is so.[93] Poems such as 'The Kiss', 'Song of Contrariety', and 'Old Wives' Tales',[94] and the predicament of the traveller in the prologue to 'The Feather Bed', present the lover as a victim who knows more of suffering and menace than of joy and tenderness. Any attempt to attain ideal love is inevitably doomed by the malevolent workings of fate. This theme reappears in a very fine poem, 'Full Moon',[95] published in Graves's next collection.

The self-righteousness and aggression of the lover in 'The Feather Bed' as he seeks to make Rachel the scapegoat for their failed relationship typify the poet's second response to love, while the cynicism and mockery with which he attempts 'To beat Love down with ridicule', thus easing his own feelings, had already been voiced in Whipperginny. The words of the Morning Star create an ideal image of love, a renewal of the vision of 'wingless Victory' found in 'The Ridge-Top',[96] and a predecessor of the Black Goddess.

Graves observed that 'The Feather Bed' 'is a necessary signpost to those friends of mine who have found the change between the two halves of my recent collection, Whipperginny, inexplicably abrupt' ; but similarly it paves the way for the future by showing his temporary determination to pursue a philosophical vein, and although his methods were to alter, ideas basic to his mature work were taking shape.

92. Graves, Mammon and the Black Goddess (1965), p.164.
93. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.75.
94. PG (1921), p.28 (for 'The Kiss').
W (1923), p.5 (for 'Song of Contrariety').
Ibid., pp.21-2 (for 'Old Wives' Tales').
95. MBH (1924), pp.8-9.

In Mock Beggar Hall, published a year after The Feather Bed, the tendency towards a poetry of abstract ideas and emotional detachment reached new limits. It is, as Graves wrote in Goodbye To All That, 'almost wholly philosophical', and in a later passage he described how at this time he came under the influence of Basanta Mallik, an Indian student whom he met at Oxford. [97] Mallik

> believed in no hierarchy of ultimate values or the possibility of any unifying religion or ideology. But at the same time he insisted on the necessity of strict discipline in the individual in meeting every possible demand made upon him from whatever quarter, and he recommended constant self-watchfulness against either dominating or being dominated by any other individual. This view of strict personal morality consistent with scepticism of social morality

accorded with Graves's own practice. [98] Be that as it may, the effects upon the poems in this collection give little cause for rejoicing, for they are nearly all repetitive in their ideas, and are both emotionally and verbally pallid. At the centre of the book lie two lengthy pieces which illustrate these points and also propound its philosophy.

The first of these works is in prose and the real author is Basanta Mallik, for, we are told, the only contribution Graves made was that he 'in part re-Englished it'. [99] Titled 'Interchange of Selves', and described as 'an actionless drama, for three actors and a moving background', it presents 'a conflict between a practical man, a mystic, and a man with [the] English genius for compromise'. [100] It is fundamental to the 'drama' that the characters do not remain bound to fixed opinions, and neither virtue nor villainy prevails. In the opening scene the three travellers discuss the significance of a shriek which one, Mysticus, claims to have heard in the night. He himself is convinced of its reality and of the importance of trusting in more than the senses in order to know life. On the other hand, Practicus maintains that common sense and rationalism are the true bases of a peaceful existence, and that war is the result of man's failure to realise this. The third traveller, Liberalis, suggests that the simple pragmatism of Practicus is not sufficiently far-reaching, while the spiritualism of Mysticus depends too exclusively upon the remote and unproven. He argues the need for a wide knowledge of history

97. GBTAT (1929), p.402.
98. Ibid., pp.403-04.
99. MBH (1924), p.37.
100. Ibid., p.38.

if we are to understand the present. Each of the speakers is forced to modify his position as the background circumstances change, giving way to a torrential rain storm which drives them, along with others, to seek safety on a mountain. The travellers first comment on the disputes that break out among the refugees, deploring the destructive side of man's nature, but as the floods continue to rise Mysticus and Liberalis become determined to fight rather than give up their shelter, while Practicus has a growing awareness of the mystery and confusion in life. In the last scene, having been saved from danger, the travellers recognise that they have compromised their professed ideals, and that experience has shown them that 'the whole gospel of the inequality of merit is a myth, a myth which the human race would do well to dispel from its memory if it chooses to live'. [101]
Practicus sums up the discussion with a long monologue in which he recognises that 'caprice' turns the wheel of life as much as reason does, and insists that when

> men and women realise that in the moment of clash and conflict they both equally stand condemned, that neither upholds 'the good' nor 'the evil' in parts, that both are out and out and wholly diseased and wrong, then they may leave their old habit of solving conflicts by force or what amounts to force and resort to some stricter and more promising path. They will neither insist on false co-operations nor on reparations which as such can never be realised. [102]

This relativist point of view, obviously descended from that found in the epilogue to 'The Feather Bed' and in poems like 'The Bowl and Rim', is typical of the conclusion Graves reached in many of the pieces in Mock Beggar Hall. It is unfortunate that the exposition of the idea is so tedious and lacking in dramatic interest, but no concession is made to the travellers as people in a credible situation. They do not even have the vividness of good allegorical figures, existing merely as pawns that come, in the words of one poem, 'from cold shores of philosophic musing'. [103]

Graves himself did somewhat better with the title work, described as 'a progression'. [104] It is a prose dialogue between a poet and a philosopher about a poem which the former is writing, and which he recites at different stages of its evolution. The poem springs

101. Ibid., p.53.
102. Ibid., pp.56-7.
103. Ibid., pp.1-3.
104. Ibid., pp.59-75.

initially from a dream of a haunted house where successive generations of ghosts, corresponding to the different tenants who have lived there, prey upon one another and upon the present occupants. The image of the haunted house is, of course, not new in Graves's poetry and its significance here as a symbol of public as well as private unrest is particularly reminiscent of 'Ghost Raddled'. At the centre of 'Mock Beggar Hall' lies the question of how to resolve the disputes between the ghosts of the past and the present rival claimants to the property. In the first draft of the poem, the landlord is advised by a speaker, who is later characterized as a lawyer, to persuade his tenants

> .... to practise tolerance,
> Allotting private times to every faction
> Inviolable by others, quick or dead;
> Reserving for themselves, free from all trespass
> Such office-hours as business may demand,
> Lest,failing to deal fairly, they themselves
> May century-long be doomed to walk these rooms. [105]

However, as the philosopher points out to the poet, the difficulty here is that tolerance, admirable as an idea, is unlikely to satisfy the ghosts. This criticism is taken up in the second version of the poem, as is the poet's own claim that he represented Mock Beggar Hall as a registry-office because 'it evidently symbolizes European civilization, officialdom attempting to control the individual to the coffin'. [106] The landlord argues that compromise solutions, like those imposed by imperial powers, lead to more and more legislation, culminating in a breakdown of the system and revolt against it. The technique of associating ideas and thus extending the scope of the original conception is similar to that employed in 'The Feather Bed', Its effect here is not as great, for the linking prose passages tend to point the message in a heavy-handed way, and, as with other poems in the collection, the situation lacks emotional power. Rather than allowing the satire on imperialism to speak for itself, which it does, there follows a lengthy prose dialogue on General Dunkel's attitude to 'the Indian question' which laboriously demonstrates that all liberalism depends upon the stability and security of the imperial power. One fells that this political cliché did not require exposition here, especially with such lack of subtlety.

105. Ibid., pp.61-2.
106. Ibid., p.62.

In the third version of the poem, the emphasis shifts again, for the landlord who, it was pointed out, could only exist with the lawyer's help, and therefore was an unsuitable opponent to him, is called 'The Other':

> He has no contact with the lawyer's practical suggestions because the law is fed by litigation and because he cannot realize himself as owner of the property until the rival claims to the estate disappear and the tenants quit. [107]

Rather than press home his rights using evidence 'Engraved on a bronze bowl in Ogham writing', he prefers to wait for the prophesied two thousand years to pass after which the property will revert to him or to his heirs:

> Then, on the day that we resume the house,
> In a most real sense we become the house,
> A house that's continuity of the tenants
> Through whom by slow accretion it evolved,
> Taking the individual stamp of each,
> Often at odds, room against room divided,
> Waiting the landlord-absentee's return,
> Long while despaired of such reintegration. [108]

In comparison with this, the lawyer's desire to fight in the courts for a settlement is exposed as a blind, futile course of action, preventative of social peace and dependent upon arguments that are finally neither more right nor more wrong than any others. Similarly, although the poem is inconclusive, it is complete, for as the poet says, 'Neither are you ended or I ended: but as in each phase of our life we are self-sufficient and complete, so the different stages of the poem'. [109]

One of the problems which this philosophy posed for Graves as a poet was that by its very nature it did not permit moments of climax and release of emotion. It was, as the title of another poem has it, an 'Essay on Continuity', [110] and this was incompatible with Graves's talent as a lyric poet particularly when - as in 'Mock Beggar Hall' - the tone is so austere. The summary we have of Mallik's beliefs indicates their cheerlessness and stoicism, and Graves identified closely with this mood. In fairness, a number of considerations must be taken into account. His autobiography shows

107. Ibid., p.69.
108. Ibid., p.72.
109. Ibid., p.75.
110. Ibid., pp.34-6.

that it was a lean time for him, with the deaths of several friends, Nancy unwell, and his financial situation so bad that he felt that he would have to break his private promise and seek a job other than writing.[111] His domestic unhappiness was matched by a crisis in his views on poetry, which he describes in this way:

> there was not such a thing as poetry of constant value; I regarded it as a product of its period only having relevance in a limited context. I regarded all poetry, in a philosophic sense, as of equal merit, though admitting that at any given time pragmatic distinctions could be drawn between such poems as embodied the conflicts and syntheses of the time and were therefore charged with contemporary sagacity, and such as were literary hang-overs from a preceding period and were therefore inept. I was, in fact, finding only extrinsic values for poetry.[112]

All these factors act and react upon one another and upon Graves's continuing nervous disorder to explain why Basanta Mallik's ideas should have appealed to him, but in some of the shorter poems - such as 'Attercop: the All-Wise Spider'[113] and 'The North Window'[114] - the irony and wit characteristic of much of his best work is not wholly suppressed.

If 'Interchange of Selves' and 'Mock Beggar Hall' record the poet's philosophical attitudes, 'Full Moon' is a significant statement of the deadlock he had reached in love.[115] The opening lines present a conventional situation which anticipates a lovers' meeting, but this is immediately betrayed:

> As I walked out one harvest night
> About the stroke of One,
> The Moon attained to her full height
> Stood beaming like the Sun.
> She exorcised the ghostly wheat
> To mute assent in Love's defeat
> Whose tryst had now begun.

Far from being a meeting in the harvest field like that of Will and Anna in D.H. Lawrence's The Rainbow, of which one is readily reminded at the outset, this is a ritual of defeat, and of the acceptance of that defeat. The moon has been associated recurrently with menace from even the earliest poems. We find it in 'I Hate the Moon',

111. GBTAT (1929), p.405.
112. Ibid., p.407.
113. MBH (1924), pp.14-5.
114. Ibid., p.13.
115. Ibid., pp.8-9.

published in Over the Brazier, [116] and in Fairies and Fusiliers there is a poem titled 'The Cruel Moon'. [117] Also in that volume, 'Finland' describes a wild song and dance ritual that takes place under 'the wintry moon'. [118] Alice, in 'A Frosty Night', has her first traumatic experience of love while 'Coldly gaped the moon', [119] and Dicky, in the poem of the same name, saw a ghost in the 'wan moonlight'. [120] The malignant gods of 'Outlaws' were 'Banished to woods and a sickly moon', [121] and in 'Reproach' the poet felt accused by a 'grieving moonlight face' above him. [122] The moon, therefore, has a long ancestry of unhappy and threatening associations in Graves's poetry, and 'Full Moon' may be taken as almost a culmination of all these previous references.

The structure of the poem is important and adds considerably to its effect, for the regularity of the verses and rhymes, and the fact that each stanza is self-contained sustain our feeling of the poet's passive acceptance of his 'Love's defeat'. One can see this, and also how, line by line, a complex picture is built up, by looking at the second and third stanzas:

> The fields lay sick beneath my tread,
> A tedious owlet cried;
> A nightingale above my head
> With this or that replied,
> Like man and wife who nightly keep
> Inconsequent debate in sleep
> As they dream side by side.
>
> Your phantom wore the Moon's cold mask,
> My phantom wore the same,
> Forgetful of the feverish task
> In hope of which they came,
> Each image held the other's eyes
> And watched a grey distraction rise
> To cloud the eager flame.

It is incongruous that a harvest field should be described as 'sick', but it matches the mood of the poem, as do the adjective 'tedious', and the indifference with which the nightingale's song is recorded. Any romance in the situation is deliberately nullified, and it is ironic that the song should be likened to some 'Inconsequent debate'

116. OB (1916), p.26.
117. FF (1917), p.18.
118. Ibid., p.19.
119. CS (1920), pp.11-2.
120. Ibid., pp.14-5.
121. Ibid., pp.40-1.
122. PG (1921), p.17.

between a man and wife. There is a hint of ritual in the repetition of 'Your phantom wore....' and 'My phantom wore....', but it is a ceremony of dead love illuminated by the moon which, with its 'cold mask', has betrayed the expectation created in the opening lines. Whether or not we accept that the phrase 'feverish task' is indicative, as Day says, of the poet's 'lifelong inclination to see love - or passion, at least - as something pathological rather than normal', [123] the closer this couple move, the more their love is paralysed by 'the tyrannous queen above/Sole mover of their fate'. The simile likening them to 'marble statues' inevitably recalls the vision of 'wingless Victory' who stood 'poised in marble thought' in 'The Ridge-top', [124] although in the present context the image has greater emotive power. There is also a precedent for the final description of their dead love and terrible personal isolation, for in 'Old Wives' Tales' mermaids were used as symbols of man's lust: [125]

> And now cold earth was Arctic sea,
> Each breath came dagger-keen;
> Two bergs of glinting ice were we,
> The broad moon sailed between;
> There swam the mermaids, tailed and finned,
> And Love went by upon the wind
> As though it had not been.

The theme of the transience and defeat of love is not new in this poem. Graves had already written of it in poems like 'The Kiss' [126] and 'Song of Contrariety', [127] and it forms the basis of The Feather Bed. 'Full Moon' is, however, an eloquently moving poem of recognition and resignation. As Michael Kirkham says:

> The practical man's resolve in 'Interchange of Selves' to face the fact that evil and caprice form a radical part of experience, and the philosopher's conviction in 'Mock Beggar Hall' that to abstain from conflict and to endure evil are the only sane courses of action - both the resolve and the conviction are reflected in the mood of this poem. [128]

Not only this, but 'Full Moon' is the clearest indication in the collection of the direction in which Graves's best poetry would develop. It is the one poem in the book that unites emotions and ideas to produce

123. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.68.
124. W (1923), p.6.
125. Ibid., pp.21-2.
126. PG (1921), p.28.
127. W (1923), p.5.
128. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.84.

the magic harmony of real poetry. Elsewhere in Mock Beggar Hall the poet's head rules at the expense of his heart and his imagination. Douglas Day is right when he observes that Graves 'is only at his best when his poetry reflects an impassioned commitment to something in which he believes fervently'. [129] His dedication to relativistic philosophy and emotional detachment at this period meant that in some respects he was working aginst his own greatest strengths as a poet. 'Full Moon', however, shows that ultimately the poet will be dominant.

Welchman's Hose (1925) - Graves's next collection - gives the philosophical attitudes of Mock Beggar Hall a new urbanity and irony. Poems such as 'Alice' [130] and 'The Clipped Stater' [131] reveal increasing sophistication in technique and tone, but do not register any significant shift from the relativist viewpoint of the previous volume. The poet's search for detachment is still evident, and his wit in 'Alice' and his irony in 'The Clipped Stater' are more impressive than the emotional power of his writing. No such reservation is necessary, however, in the case of 'Essay on Knowledge', particularly in its later revised form, for here Graves achieves a unity of thought, emotion and style similar in power though different in execution to his success in 'Full Moon'. [132] His knowledge amounts to a mature awareness of the uncertainty and unpredictability of life:

> Be assured, the Dragon is not dead,
> Who once more from the pools of peace
> Shall rear his fabulous green head.

In 'Old Wives'Tales' the poet discovered the reality of the dragons of childhood stories, and in addition to this he now knows that their submergence from view is no guarantee of their final disappearance. The 'pools of peace' are temporary, and liable to be deceptive. Dragons as such are fabulous, but the disruptive force they symbolise is wholly real. The idea is continued in the next two stanzas:

> The flowers of innocence shall cease.
> And like a harp the wind shall roar
> And the clouds shake an angry fleece.
>
> 'Here, here is certitude', you swore,
> 'Below this lightning-blasted tree.
> Where once it strikes, it strikes no more'.

129. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.70.
130. WH (1925), pp.1-2.
131. Ibid., pp.40-4.
132. Ibid., p.49.

The movement through these stanzas is directed inwards. We begin with the dragon and the 'flowers of innocence', and then our attention is focused upon an individual, someone who holds a less sceptical view than that of the poet. In the fourth stanza this movement carries on and the central problem, the instability of love, is finally broached. (The following quotation is from the revised and retitled version of 1938 which is superior to the original.)[133]

Two lovers in one house agree,
The roof is tight, the walls unshaken,
As now, so must it always be.

Suddenly the poem becomes very personal, though in no sense private, and the poet goes on to enunciate his insight into the vanity of such confidence. It is no accident that the poem was re-titled 'Vanity'. Again the quotation is from the 1938 version:

Such prophecies of joy awaken
The toad who dreams away the past
Under your hearth-stone, light-forsaken,

Who knows that certitude at last
Must fall away in vanity -
No gate is fast, no door is fast.

The dragon of the first verse becomes the toad, rich in associations of malevolence, in the fifth. The tone of these lines, unsensational and quiet as they are, is authoritative and utterly convincing. Their effectiveness is given a final ring of inevitability and truth as the poem closes with a stanza which draws together the earlier images of the poem, showing the irruptive nature of change and misfortune:

The thunder bursts from the blue sky,
The gardens of the mind fall waste,
The age-established brooks run dry,
For the Dragon will not die.

In this poem Graves passes beyond being a mere spokesman for a relativistic theory. The idea that no relationship is everlasting is placed in a wider context of the inevitable interruptions that occur throughout the natural world. The romanticism of the person who believes that 'As now, so must it always be' is rebuked by the cumulative evidence against it, and so too, one might add by way of extending the

133. CP (1938), p.69.

argument, is the cheerful tone of 'Alice'. Kirkham is right when he speaks of 'Essay on Knowledge' as a

> fully realistic poem... a poem, that is, whose chief aim is to embody some aspect of truth, to represent things as they actually are, rather than to express - or exorcise - some state of conflict in the poet. [134]

His detachment here is related to the discipline of the poem's structure. The use of images such as the dragon and the toad, or situations like the lovers in one house, creates a series of clearcut implications which the reader cannot evade.

Another fine poem, 'To Our Ghostly Enemy', anticipates the themes which were to become increasingly central to Graves's work during his partnership with Laura Riding. It deals with the resolution of his haunted state, telling how, in the dead of night, while 'The moon shone bright as day',

> ....the lamp went out
> And the clock at that signal stopped.
> The man in the chair held his breath
> As if Death were about. [135]

The details of moonlight, a late hour, and the clock are familiar to us from earlier poems, but they are joined with others that we associate with Mock Beggar Hall. There 'The North Window' had shown the confusion of good and evil, and now the man in 'From Our Ghostly Enemy' is tempted as the words in his prayer-book suddenly appear to him as instructions to kill. The difference between this ghost, which is internal and causes distortion to the poet's view of the outside world, and its predecessor is indicated in words that echo the 'spirits in the web hung room' of 'Ghost Raddled':

> 'I know of an attic ghost,
> Of a cellar ghost,
> And of one that stalks in the meadows,
> But here's the spirit I dread, '
> He said, 'the most;
> 'Who, without voice or body,
> Distresses me much,
> Twists the ill to the holy, holy to ill,
> Confuses me, out of reach
> Of speech or touch;
> 'Who works by moon or by noon,
> Threatening my life.'

134. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.96.
135. WH (1925), pp.5-7.

The interesting thing is that the poet is able to resolve his fear with a minimum of difficulty by following the good advice of his wife who, in this context, seems to anticipate the White Goddess in her kinder aspect. She tells him to speak to the ghost and come to an amicable agreement on the grounds that their anguish is mutual, and when he does this

> ...the lamp was lit again,
> And the dumb clock ticked again,
> And the reign of peace began.

This resolution, or 'dispersion of fear' as J.M. Cohen has it, is a matter of rational agreement and an acceptance of the need for tolerance, rather than exorcism.[136] As a conclusion it matches the spirit of Lucifer's words in 'The Feather Bed' and of the landlord's final statement in 'Mock Beggar Hall'. Once again we see Graves adapting philosophical ideas he had worked out in the previous two volumes to new poetic advantage. If the influence of Robert Frost outweighs that of Basanta Mallik in 'From Our Ghostly Enemy', the poem is the better for it. But while wishing to suggest that Graves was making extensive use of ideas he had already put forward elsewhere, it does not follow that Welchman's Hose corresponded to a period of stagnation or marking time. On the contrary, he shows a keen awareness of structure, language and style, and the resulting flexibility of tone is a substantial achievement. It heralds his advance from the generally austere and colourless poetry of Mock Beggar Hall and opens up fresh possibilities.

These possibilities were not exploited in The Marmosite's Miscellany, the third volume of poetry Graves published in 1925.[137] However, in this long satire on religion and contemporary literature, modelled on the form of Skelton's 'Speke Parot', two points are important in considering his thoughts about poetry. The marmosite, which the poet claims to have seen in a cage at a World Exhibition, is an observer of the idiosyncrasies of men in their search for truth and religion, and he cynically asserts that financial success is the criterion by which any spiritual movement is judged. Yet he denies that he himself is without principles, arguing that he simply cannot subscribe to the dogma of any sect, for the attempt to classify

136. Cohen, Robert Graves (1960), p.43.
137. 'John Doyle', MM (1925).

an omnipotent God seems contradictory to him. This, along with his acceptance of equality amongst men and the wrongness of all sides in a conflict, is again consistent with the views of Lucifer in 'The Feather Bed', the landlord in 'Mock Beggar Hall', and the poet himself in 'Ovid in Defeat'; but the last two stanzas in the first part of the poem place the philosophy in a new context which directly anticipates the White Goddess mythology:

'The Moon is the Mistress of escape and pity,
Her regions are portalled by an ivory gate.
There are fruit-plats and fountains in her silver city,
With honeysuckle hedges where true lovers mate,
With undisputed thrones where beggars hold state,
With smooth hills and fields where in freedom may run
All men maimed and manacled by the cruel sun.

'Her madness is musical, kindly her mood,
She is Dian no more when the sun quits the skies,
She is the happy Venus of the hushed wood.
So artless Acteon may banquet his eyes
At the crisp hair curling on her naked thighs,
At her shapely shoulders, her breasts and her knees,
She will kiss him pleasantly under tall trees.' [138]

On this occasion the moon is celebrated as a source of escape, pity, kirdness and affection, a description which differs markedly from its cruel associations in poems like 'Full Moon', 'Reproach' and 'A Frosty Night'. The lines bear a distinct resemblance to the additional stanza in the 1938 version of 'The Land of Whipperginny', which reads:

Soon the Moon will arise, and on us have pity,
Drawing us in secretly by an ivory gate
To the orchards and fountains of her silver city
Where lovers need not argue the tokens of fate.[139]

They also recall the description of the Goddess Isis as it appears in The Golden Ass, one of the poet's favourite texts, and, so he maintains, the fullest account of the White Goddess , in classical literature. The poem, 'The White Goddess', speaks of her having'hair curled honey-coloured to white hips', and tells how

138. Ibid., p.13.
139. CP (1938), p.58.

....we are gifted, even in November
Rawest of seasons, with so huge a sense
Of her nakedly worn magnificence
We forget cruelty and past betrayal,
Heedless of where the next bright bolt may fall.[140]

Thus it may be said that this is the first appearance in Graves's poetry of a vision of the Moon Goddess that has become central to his entire way of thought. It is also the most interesting feature of The Marmosite's Miscellany which, as a whole, arouses little enthusiasm.

There is, however, one other aspect of it that deserves note. In the second part of the poem, the marmosite launches into a satire against his fellow poets and writers. Douglas Day may well be right when he suggests that Graves adopted the pseudonym of 'John Doyle' for this publication because he did not wish to be caught in the act of attacking, amongst others, Edward Marsh who had originally supported him during the war years.[141] The attack itself is less interesting than the conclusion which follows, for in it the marmosite voices a very disillusioned view of the state of poetry. It has no appeal to the 'Square-headed merchants of practical parts' whose influence dominates the world, but is a 'lost cause' supported, like a dying religion, by only a handful of old faithfuls. Indeed, the marmosite regards his own behaviour as a shout of defiance uttered against the prevailing lack of interest, and in 'Tail Piece' the poet shows that he too is opposed to the dilettantes who are interested in nothing more than

A lick at every stopper,
And a sniff at every flask.[142]

These misgivings about the state of poetry reappear in a slightly different form in two works published in Poems 1914 - 1926. 'The Corner Knot' concerns the poet's doubts about his own ability, and his consequent disillusionment.[143] As a child, he was carried away by the music of Mozart so that he corner-knotted his handkerchief:

Faithful familiar that I hold or shake
In these cold airs for proof that I'm awake.

140. CP (1975), p.157.
141. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.93.
142. MM (1925), p.18.
143. P 1914-1926 (1927), pp.173-74.

When the concert ended, the knot remained as witness of his ecstasy, but now, twenty years later, he realises that even Mozart's music - despite its brilliance and evocativeness - was but a 'remembrancer' of the vision the composer had, although it has served as the gateway to unsuspected areas of imagination and emotion for countless less gifted people. This insight is close to Shelley's when he wrote that 'the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet.'[144] The disillusionment is even more pronounced in 'Virgil the Sorcerer'.[145] Here true poetry, described as 'a spell of furious power', is exemplified by the alleged imaginative strength of Virgil of Toledo which served to free himself and his fellow prisoners from gaol. This is rejected as an art beyond the ability of modern poets. Instead,

> When we should step our masts we trundle hoops;
> Art is most rare though boasts of art are plenty.

Would-be poets either become 'lick-spittle' writers like the other and better known Virgil, or else

> ...Time the limiter wears us to rags
> Aided by Doubt and Sloth, demons of spite
> Whose daily fouling soaks the dungeon flags
> And splashes the long wall on which we write,
>
> Till we at last grow filthy; we condone
> The unmoving present: on a mound of mud
> We loll red-eyed and wan, whittling a bone,
> Vermined, the low gaol-fever in our blood.

The poet's bitterness and disappointment in the face of apparent impossibility are reflected in the vocabulary and harsh sound of these lines. As with his satire in The Marmosite's Miscellany and the comments cited from Goodbye To All That, they are evidence of Graves's severe doubts about poetry itself. No longer is he preoccupied simply with his own poetic talent and the possible effects of psychoanalysis upon it. His concern is now general as well as personal, a fact supported by the series of books about poetry which he published between 1926 and 1928, some by him alone, others in collaboration with the American poet, Laura Riding, with whom he

144. P.B. Shelley, A Defence of Poetry in The Four Ages of Poetry, ed. H.F.B. Brett-Smith (1921, 8th imp. 1972) p.54.
145. P 1914-1926 (1927), pp.173-77.

became acquainted in 1926.

The partnership between Robert Graves and Laura Riding lasted from 1926 until 1938, and critics agree that her influence on him was of great importance. By attempting to outline some of Miss Riding's views on poetry and on life it is possible to see why they appealed to Graves, and then to suggest how he adapted them to his own ends. In the first place, Laura Riding saw herself as an opponent of the conventional literary establishment, the 'lick-spittle' poets that Graves mentioned in 'Virgil the Sorcerer'. She openly asserted the peculiar power and value of poetry. In the introduction to her Collected Poems, she wrote:

> A poem is an uncovering of truth of so fundamental and general a kind that no other name besides poetry is adequate except truth. Knowledge implies specialized fields of exploration and discovery; it would be inexact to call poetry a kind of knowledge. It is even inexact to call it a kind of truth, since 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 merely of parts. [146]

Poems which achieve this uncovering of truth are written for 'right positive' reasons, whereas poems written for 'right negative' reasons teach what is false and thus destroy the power of falsity.[147] It is clear that in Laura Riding Graves found another writer who was equally sceptical of the state of contemporary literature, but one who had greater confidence than he had in 1926.

Laura Riding's discontent was not confined to the sphere of literature. She related the decline of art to the general confusion of a society which had been led astray by its own false values, and in two lengthy books she sought to diagnose its failure. The earlier of these volumes, Anarchism is Not Enough, attacks what she calls 'the Myth' of society, the object of which

> is to give happiness: to help the baby pretend that what is ephemeral is permanent....The stronger grows the inward conviction of the futility of the Myth, the stronger grows the outward unity and form of the Myth. It becomes the universal sense of duty, the ethics of abstract neighbourliness. It is the repository for whatever one does without knowing why; it makes itself the why. [148]

146. Laura Riding, Collected Poems (1938), p.xviii.
147. Ibid., p.xxv.
148. Laura Riding, Anarchism is Not Enough (1928), pp.9-10.

Poetry stands outside and against the Myth:

> It is all the truth it knows, that is, it knows nothing. It is the art of not living. It has no system, harmony, form, public significance or sense of duty. It is what happens when the baby crawls off the altar and is 'Resolv'd to be a very contrary fellow' - resolved not to pretend, learn to talk or versify. [149]

We know that Graves was drawn to the idea of poetry as the source of truth as far back as 1916 when he wrote 'Goliath and David', and the concern had persisted throughout his career. Indeed, the disillusionment in 'The Corner Knot' and 'Virgil the Sorcerer' derive from his doubts that the power of poetry could reach ultimate truth. Laura Riding said that the purpose of poetry was

> to destroy all that prose formally represents. It is an exclusive medium, and its merit depends on the economy with which it can remove the social rhythmic clutter of communicative language. The savage tom-tom is poetry of a brutally specialized kind used to eliminate everything in the listeners but the purpose with which it has been argumentatively overloaded. Non-purposive poetry has all the eliminating force of the tom-tom without the grotesque effects of special pleading. [150]

The stress upon self-discipline and against self-indulgence is important, and undoubtedly was one of the major lessons Graves learnt from her. It is found, for example, in 'To the Galleys' (subsequently retitled 'Thief'), where he calls for a rejection of all the softness of so-called civilized society: [151]

> To the galleys, thief, and sweat your soul out
> With strong tugging under the curled whips,
> That there your thievishness may have full play.
> Whereas, before, you stole rings, flowers and watches,
> Oaths, jests and proverbs,
> Yet paid for bed and board like an honest man,
> This shall be entire thiefdom, you shall steal
> Sleep from chain-galling, diet from soured crusts,
> Comradeship from the damned, the ten-year chained,
> And more than this, the excuse for life itself
> From the galley steered toward battles not your own.

149. Ibid., p.11.
150. Ibid., p.116.
151. P 1929 (1929), p.4.

The thief becomes a kind of anti-hero because he does not respect society's conventions, and his service in the galleys is, like the work of the poet, hard and self-denying. The old romantic self is rejected in favour of Mind, the new ruler and master. The poet's intention is matched here, as Kirkham says, by 'the sparseness and directness - the absence of flourish - in communicating poetic thought'. [152]

Another idea appears in Anarchism is Not Enough which, though not really explored until The World and Ourselves was published in 1938, had great significance. This relates to Laura Riding's views on the nature of men and women. She wrote:

> The male mind is conventional because the male body is a mere convention. The female body is unconventional because it is individualistic: man gets somewhat socially and vaguely just children, woman gets personally and precisely a child. The female mind is therefore unconventional because it is individualistic, that is, because woman is physically an individual to a degree to which man is not. Therefore man is intellectual, woman is intuitional: man is unconquerable monotony, woman conquerable variety. [153]

Here are the seeds of an idea that has since become of paramount importance for Graves. We have already seen that in The Marmosite's Miscellany Diana, the Moon Goddess, was revealed as a source of comfort and strength to the poet. In 'Pygmalion to Galatea', this theme was renewed and Galatea is shown to embody all the mystery, variety and life-giving powers later associated with the muse goddess. [154] Pygmalion is imagined singing to the statue he created:

> 'As you are woman, so be lovely:
> As you are lovely, so be various,
> Merciful as constant, constant as various,
> So be mine, as I yours for ever.'

To this Galatea replies:

> '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.'

152. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.125.
153. Riding, Anarchism is Not Enough (1928), p.207.
154. P 1914-1926 (1927), pp.201-03.

He has created her, yet she has the power, if she will, to liberate him. In the same way the poet or maker is always dependent on the muse, although the relationship is usually presented as an unequal one in Graves's poems, the woman being decisively dominant while the poet finds his freedom in unswerving service.

In another poem, 'Against Kind', published in Poems 1929, Graves attempts to define the individualistic character of woman, and, in particular, of Laura Riding.[155] Here her elusiveness, the fact that she cannot be labelled or categorized, gives her power and importance which are a perpetual trial to those who want definitions and easily attainable classifications of people. She cannot be ignored, and indeed her absence is more powerful than her presence could be:

> It was not that they would prefer her presence
> To her room (they hated her) but that her room
> Could not be filled by any creature of kind,
> It gaped; they shook with sudden impotence.

The individuality of the woman is complete, and it is this which Graves is praising in his odd kind of love poem, one of a number written during his association with Laura Riding.

However, it was in The World and Ourselves that Miss Riding developed her opinions about the relative merits and characteristics of men and women most fully. Where she wrote of those who did or did not subscribe to 'the Myth' in Anarchism Is Not Enough, she now spoke of 'inside' and 'outside' people. 'Outside' people are the majority, 'those who live more by convention than by immediate original reaction'; whereas 'with the inside person rests the power of reinvigorating the rhythm of life in time: the inside person holds the key not only to values of self but also to values of mass existence'.[156] The essential qualities of an inside person are defined as

> a belief in the necessary existence of inside people, and an eagerness to discover them free of any taint of competitive individualism. Then, the inside person must think and live with an accent of finality that subdues the stress of outer things, processes and events to their proper negativeness, reducing them to temporary relevance and final irrelevance. Thirdly, the inside person must be

155. P 1929 (1929), p.11.
156. Laura Riding, The World and Ourselves (1938), p.268.

> stubborn in insideness - must resist implication in outer argument and struggle and have an unshakeable patience in his quiet constancy. [157]

In this last point especially one is reminded of the words of Lucifer at the conclusion of The Feather Bed, and of the promise of peace offered by the Black Goddess.

When Laura Riding turns to find examples of inside people, she looks first at women. Indeed, this is a vital part of her thesis: 'we must count women as initially existent on inside ground'. [158] Women are inside people because of their very nature and their resources which are deeper than those of men. We are told:

> when men reach the end of the obvious resources, they can only face, despairingly, the unknown. When women reach the end of the obvious resources, they turn instinctively to something in themselves. [159]

Were women to rule the world and inside values to become dominant, there would be an end of violence and of 'the attempt to make communication a wholly physical affair... jargon countered with jargon, formula with formula'. [160] Elsewhere we read:

> the end of being what he is must be construed for man by woman. The moral stability of the world depends on the framing of a new moral law from the point of view of women. It is women who see, finally, what men are; men can only see what they are not and what they want to be. Men of themselves could never reach final content with themselves. [161]

It is easy to recognise in this sentiments which Graves has made his own. As the title of one of his more recent collections of poetry puts it, Man Does, Woman Is. The idea has already been observed in 'Pygmalion to Galatea', where the sculptor appealed to his creation for mercy. Laura Riding says, 'forgiveness is the male way, mercy the female way'; and by this token, women become the 'hostesses of existence', 'the proprietors of life'. [162] It is allowed that some men, especially poets, may share to a degree the inside qualities natural to women. Such men's writing is 'the positive expression of personal reality', and the moral end of their lives is to foster 'the good self', while the moral end of their writing is 'the good company. The writer is properly the discoverer and preserver of the world's good company'. [163]

157. Ibid., p.238.
158. Ibid., p.251.
159. Ibid., p.25.
160. Ibid., p.276.
161. Ibid., p.478.
162. Ibid., p.484 and p.379

Robert Graves seems to have found a kindred spirit in Laura Riding, a poet and a philosopher whose ideas were more fully realized than his own, and who was able to relate her theories to a wider social context than he himself had done. This last fact may perhaps be the most important aspect of her influence upon him, because the myth of the White Goddess which Graves eventually described gives his opinions the universal dimension they had previously lacked. That the goddess myth includes many ideas akin to those of Laura Riding can scarcely be coincidence, but it would be wrong to suggest that Graves has merely dressed up either her theories or his own psychological problems in borrowed robes. This is a point which he went to some lengths to clarify in an essay published in Steps. Dealing particularly with Randall Jarrell's claim that the White Goddess is 'grotesque nonsense, a personal fantasy', he maintains that Jarrell

> cannot accuse me of inventing the White Goddess, or any facts about her worship in ancient days... 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 the myths and give them historical sense.[164]

It is less easy to deny that the myth has psychological implications, however, and that one can understand why Graves found himself particularly convinced of its truth.

Similarly, to say that Laura Riding was the prototype of the White Goddess, and therefore that she has remained 'the perpetual other woman' in his poetry, is to oversimplify a complex relationship, though not to miss the truth entirely.[165] Certainly, it is from the time of their relationship that we encounter 'muse poems' of the kind that Graves has subsequently encouraged us to associate with service of the goddess. For example, the title poem of To Whom Else? is a statement of dedication to Laura Riding, his Muse, who shares the mystery but also the tangibility later associated with the goddess:[166]

> 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?

164. Graves, Steps (1958), pp.94-5.
165. Graves, Oxford Addresses on Poetry (1962), p.64.
166. TWE? (Majorca: 1931), p.13.

Michael Kirkham makes a valuable point about this poem, noting that its 'chief fault lies, perhaps, in its uncertainty of genre. The poet is undecided whether he is celebrating a real woman or a mythological figure symbolizing certain aspects of woman's power.' [167] This is precisely the dilemma from which the myth eventually released Graves, and the fact that even in 1931 he realized that he was celebrating more than a mere woman indicates an intuitive awareness that later proved correct. The style of the poem with its cumulative phrases and clipped syntax is reminiscent of Laura Riding's poetry and is less typical of Graves's writing, as well as less successful, than another poem published in the same collection. 'On Portents' has not only the virtue of economy but also the evocativeness of emblematic poems such as 'Love without Hope'. In the 'As It Were' poems which immediately precede 'On Portents', Graves identifies Laura Riding with Isis, the Egyptian vegetation goddess, and himself with Osiris, her servant and annual sacrificial victim. [168] If, as Kirkham suggests, 'we may safely assume that it is therefore Isis whose presence causes the supernatural events recorded in this poem' ('On Portents'), we can see even more clearly that although he was unaware of it, Graves was already laying the groundwork for the later myth:[169]

> If strange things happen where she is
> So that men say that graves open
> And the dead walk, or that futurity
> Becomes a womb and the unborn are shed,
> Such portents are not to be wondered at
> Being tourbillions in Time made
> By the strong pulling of her bladed mind
> Through that ever-reluctant element. [170]

This is also the poem which opens the final section of his Collected Poems (1938), where he claimed to be expressing 'a more immediate sense of poetic liberation - achieved not by mysticism but by practical persistence'. [171] It is from this volume, marking the close of a major phase of Graves's development, that a number of other poems come which indicate his new strength.

In 'The Ages of Oath' the poet deliberately rejects his search for the unusual and far-fetched - 'The memorable feats of childhood... The lost, the freakish, the unspelt' - which he mistook for truth.[172]

167. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.142.
168. TWE? (1931), pp.14-8.
169. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.221.
170. TWE?(1931), p.19.
171. CP (1938), p.xiii.
172. Ibid., p.181.

The third and last verse is a moving admission of the way in which he rediscovered 'The pleasure shared by many hearts', and he concludes by asking whether now he really has found truth:

And is this to begin afresh, with oaths
On the right book, in the right name,
Then stammering out my praise of you,
Like a boy owning his first love ?

It is a remarkable statement of humility before experience by a man of forty-three who had at last purged himself of his worst fears and hauntings, a theme directly mentioned in the penultimate poem of the book, 'No More Ghosts'. [173] Here Graves celebrates his liberation from all the distorting, restricting and distressing influences of the past. In this sense he balances it with the opening poem of the collection, 'Haunted House', and even echoes a phrase from that early work when he mentions 'attic glooms'.

The patriarchal bed with four posts
Which was a harbourage of ghosts

reminds us of 'The Pier-Glass', but now it is 'hauled out... And cut to wholesome furniture for wholesome rooms'. The power of the ghosts to 'disturb our ordered ease' is negligible:

We are restored to simple days, are free
From cramps of dark necessity,
And one another recognize
By an immediate love that signals at our eyes.

The phrase 'cramps of dark necessity' is a highly appropriate description of the former condition from which the poet is now freed because the ghosts are bound by time,

But here only such loves can last
As do not ride upon the weathers of the past.

His calm and confidence are not complacent, and can only properly be appreciated with awareness of the long struggle that preceded them. Graves is taking stock of a new situation, one which he had longed for and imagined before, but had never satisfactorily experienced.

Finally we see him casting his eye over the past since the time of his self-imposed exile in Majorca. 'A Country Mansion' is in some respects a very Yeatsian poem, except that Graves is glad to have shaken off tradition where the other poet prayed for his daughter

173. Ibid., p.189.

to be 'Rooted in one dear perpetual place'.[174] The house - a recurrent image in Graves's work - is shown as having fallen into decline:

A bedroom with a low ceiling
Caused little fret at first;
But gradual generations of discomfort
Have bred an anger there to stifle sleep.[175]

The inhabitants of the mansion outlasted all changes until

The last-born of this race of sacristans
Broke the long spell, departed;

and in spite of the pressures upon him, he will never return to it as his home:

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.

This may perhaps be described as the poetic complement to Goodbye To All That, and it forms a temperate and considered statement of the way in which Graves had come to view his relationship to his family and country. There is no bitterness, but an unflinching self-assurance in the correctness of his decision to leave England, a conviction from which Graves has not wavered in later years.

The Collected Poems (1938) might appear to show Robert Graves standing on the threshold of fresh possibilities and achievement. Yet, in fact, he published very little new poetry in the next decade, although at the end of that period The White Goddess was written. It may be argued that this myth which seemed to offer so much at first has in practice had a rather limiting effect on Graves's poetry, so that much of what he has said since has been in the nature of restatement. Certainly the allegation could not be made with justice against the poems of the years 1914-1938. Throughout that period Graves was endeavouring to find his true voice as a poet. It was a quest inextricably bound up with the events in his own life, and in

174. W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems (1965), p.213.
175. CP (1938), pp.163-65.

this sense the poetry truly does form a 'spiritual autobiography', the stages of which represent 'the struggle to be a poet in more than a literary sense'. [176]

In the introduction to his Collected Poems (1938), Graves observed that 'my health as a poet lies in my mistrust of the comfortable point of rest'. [177] There is no point of rest in the poems of that volume, although they may lead through to a certain position. But whether he regarded poetry as fantasy, as escape, as therapy, as philosophy, as satire, or as truth dependent upon service to the muse, Graves has always regarded it as an inspired art demanding complete dedication. Poetry, he has written, means 'making something remarkable happen'. [178] His conviction has been there from the outset, and his total devotion to it has helped to make him something of a unique figure amongst twentieth-century English poets. His achievement is inseparable from his beliefs, and his central beliefs were largely formed by his experiences from the beginning of his writing life until the end of his collaboration with Laura Riding in 1938. During these years he evolved as a poet, and his subsequent career can only be appreciated when their importance has been adequately understood.

176. Ibid., p.xiii.
177. Ibid., p.xxiv.
178. [illegible]

Chapter Two.

An Examination of Important Themes in the Poetry of Robert Graves during the Years 1914 - 1938.

A study of Robert Graves's poetry reveals that a number of themes continued to interest him throughout the period 1914-1938, and in this chapter an attempt is made to outline these themes, to trace the development of the poet's views on them, and to evaluate their significance for him. The chapter is divided into four sections, each dealing with one aspect of his work, and although this does not provide an exhaustive coverage of his poetry, it is meant to suggest his main preoccupations and propose certain links between them.

Part One: Poetry.

The previous chapter (pp.22-6) showed that Graves was attracted by the idea of poetry and of what it means to be a poet as far back as the opening poem of his first collection (1916). In discussing the gradual evolution of his poetic theory, poems have been cited to illustrate particular phases in his thought and practice. However, his concern with poetry and the poet as a theme in its own right has provided the impulse for a surprisingly large number of poems. They appear at every stage in his work and are important aids to our understanding both of the man and of his writing. 'The Poet in the Nursery' opened Over the Brazier, and the title poem ended it. While the former poem deals with the poet's enthusiasm and readiness to encounter adult experiences, 'Over the Brazier' reveals the degree to which Graves's hopes had been undermined after a year in the trenches. His entry into the adult world was brutal and bloody, and poetry rapidly became associated with his wish to escape to sanity and safety. The theme of the poem is:

> What life to lead and where to go
> After the War, after the War,

and the poet imagines:

> ...'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'. [1]

1. OB (1916), pp.31-2.

The lines describe a fairly conventional literary retreat, but in context they also constitute an image of escape, as do the 'Idyllic dwellings' longed for by his friends, Willy and Mac. The fact that these two are already dead leads the poet to question his chance of mere survival, let alone retiring to a haven in North Wales. In this way the whole collection, Over the Brazier, moves from the delight and optimism of the opening poem to the uncertainty and nostalgia of the poem that concludes it.

Graves soon came to regard the poet not as a man who had made good his escape from society, but as one who was inevitably on the outside, by definition aware of its blindness and decadence. Thus the bard in 'Ghost Raddled' is a 'surly fellow' who will not pander to the whims of his betters and entertain them with fanciful songs about 'flowers and butterflies' in a 'blind December'. [2] He is the realist, ready to face up to the bleak facts of the situation around him. Similarly, it is the poet who is presented as a man of character and sturdiness in 'Rocky Acres', perhaps Graves's best known work of these early years. [3] The poem has received more than its fair share of praise. J.M. Cohen has described it as 'the outstanding poem' in Country Sentiment, [4] and Douglas Day goes even further, claiming that not only is it the best poem in the volume, but 'one of the best that Graves has ever written'. [5] He adds that 'for the first time we see Graves's true, mature manner sustained throughout an entire poem'. Undoubtedly it is a striking piece of work, but we must consider carefully whether it merits such enthusiasm.

From the first line the poet is on the offensive, insisting upon his voluntary identification with the place he describes:

> 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.

The landscape is significantly lacking in human associations, and is untamed and dangerous. Such animal life as it supports lives under the menacing shadow of the buzzard which is ready to swoop and destroy.

2. CS (1920), p.51.
3. Ibid., pp.28-9.
4. Cohen, Robert Graves (1960), p.20.
5. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.24.

It is, we are told in the second stanza, a land which denies tenderness and pity, and life there is 'A hardy adventure, full of fear and shock', continuing like a dream in a timeless way, without regard for the normal passage of the seasons:

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

By linking himself with these rocky acres, which are in turn associated with ancient times, violence and gods, the poet identifies with what is socially unacceptable, an idea he also hinted at in 'Outlaws'. The very phrase, 'proud gods', used to describe the former tenants of the strongholds, is used in the other poem.[6] The 'fat burghers' against whom he sets himself represent a blind and complacent society, similar to that attacked through the words of the minstrel in 'Ghost Raddled'. In addition, their obesity and remoteness suggest a lack of self-discipline and easy-going sensuality that are abhorrent to the spartan, intolerant exile.

The scene of the poem is readily located. In Goodbye To All That, Graves wrote:

> The third part of Harlech, which became the most important to us... was the desolate rocky hill-country at the back of the village... We knew that country as a quite ungeographical region; any stray sheep farmers that we met who belonged to the place we resented somehow as intruders on our privacy...On our visits to Germany I had felt a sense of home in my blood in a natural human way, but on the hills behind Harlech I found a personal harmony independent of history or geography. The first poem I wrote as myself concerned that hill-country.[7]

It seems reasonable to assume that this refers to 'Rocky Acres', and if so we can see that Graves himself gives this poem a special place. The landscape has altered radically in significance and meaning from the earlier romantic isolation in a poem like 'Willaree', and now the

6. CS (1920), pp.40-1.
7. GBTAT (1929), p.56 and p.58.

scene which the buzzard dominates is praised for its brutality. This fact calls into question Douglas Day's observation that 'Rocky Acres' presents 'a craggy but ideal haven for a man who has done with war, but who rejects the softness of peace'. [8] Far from being dissociated from violence, the landscape, whether viewed in psychological or literal terms, is directly linked with it. Indeed, violence is its primary characteristic. It is territory which deliberately precludes sympathetic relationships, and this must be taken as a comment on Graves's own situation and his feeling of isolation and helplessness. The point becomes even clearer when, in Collected Poems (1914-1947), the fifth line of stanza two was revised to read: 'Tenderness and pity the heart will deny'.[9] The fact that the change was not made until 1947 when the crisis was over may reflect the poet's defensiveness at the original time of writing. One senses that the tone is so uncompromisingly forceful that it must be a form of compensatory defiance, originating in the poet's insecurity rather than in any real strength. He is trying to convince himself as well as the reader of his resilience, and he seeks to do so by sheer verbal belligerence.

In Whipperginny the forthright defiance of 'Rocky Acres' was followed by a series of poems in which Graves took stock of his views on poetry and his position as a poet The tone of the poems is less strident than that of 'Rocky Acres' and they reflect the new directions which, as the introduction tells us, he was seeking. 'In Procession', forexample, is a somewhat confused poem, but aspects of it are reminiscent of earlier work, while also reflecting the poet's changing opinions. [10] The rhymed trimeters and the references to Keats and Blake recall 'Free Verse', which first appeared in Over the Brazier (1916). [11] Now the range of poets to whom reference is made has increased:

> Donne (for example's sake),
> Keats, Marlowe, Spenser, Blake,
> Shelley and Milton,
> Shakespeare and Chaucer, Skelton -

and the writer's attitude to them is more complex, for he realises that

> The poets of old,
> Each with his pen of gold
> Gloriously writing,
> Found no need for fighting,
> In common being so rich.

8. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.25.
9. CP (1948), p.9.
10. W (1923), pp.29-33.
11. OB (1916), pp.13-4.

Like his masters, he will voice loud his ambition, but admits that he is often likely to fail in realising it. The poem then launches into one hundred and one lines describing Graves's awe-inspiring but incommunicable visions. This witty use of occupatio was adapted to much greater purpose in 'The Lord Chamberlain tells of a Famous Meeting', but was not new to Graves there. He had already experimented with it in 'To Robert Nichols', a poem published in Fairies and Fusiliers.[12] The details which the poet says appear 'On the screen of my teeming mind' are colourful and romantic - carnival wagons, saints, dragons, our Saviour's blood, fat Silenus' flagons, and so on. Some of the references return us to the world of childhood and the escapist fancies dismissed by Graves in his introduction to the collection:

> Telling also of Cockaigne,
> Of that glorious kingdom, Cand,
> Of the Delectable Land,
> The land of Crooked Stiles,
> The Fortunate Isles,
> Of the more than three score miles
> That to Babylon lead...

In the penultimate stanza, the poem strikes out in another direction, for the details of the Town of Hell which the poet wishes he could write about with full vigour and strength, introduce a wholly different and more sinister note. Here we encounter the post-war society with which Graves was becoming increasingly disillusioned. The gloomy atmosphere and sense of desolation and futility immediately bring to mind T.S. Eliot's 'Preludes', and the 'certain half-deserted streets' which Prufrock invites us to walk with him:

> Especially I could tell
> Of the Town of Hell,
> A huddle of dirty woes
> And houses in endless rows
> Straggling across all space;
> Hell has no market-place,
> Nor point where four ways meet,
> Nor principal street,
> Nor barracks, nor Town Hall,
> Nor shops at all,

12. FF (1917), pp.8-9.

Nor rest for weary feet,
Nor theatre , square, or park
Nor lights after dark,
Nor churches nor inns,
Nor convenience for sins,
Hell nowhere begins,
Hell nowhere ends,
But over the world extends
Rambling, dreary, limitless, hated well:
The suburbs of itself, I say is Hell.

Not only in the context of the poem is this a surprising piece of writing, reminding us of Marlowe's 'Why this is Hell. Nor are we out of it', but it is also a comment on the nature of society unprecedented in Graves's poetry. In 'Oh, and Oh! ' there was a reference to 'dirty streets in stench and smoke' and to the ugliness of the love-making by 'pale townsfolk', and poems such as 'Ghost Raddled' and 'Rocky Acres' implied that society was unhealthy; but the lines quoted above suggest a social and spiritual malaise on a scale that is quite new.
Having done so, he returns with equal abruptness to

... the sweets
Of Spenser and Keats
And the calm joy that greets
The chosen of Apollo !

It is not so very different from the contrast made by Keats between the world of here and now where men sit and hear each other groan, and the 'foam/Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn' glimpsed through 'magic casements'. But the writer does not include himself in the happy band who have found escape; he is left contending with

The seeds that I follow
In my own fierce way.

The word 'fierce' brings us back to the aggression and discipline mentioned in the introduction to the collection and adds to the distinction between the ease of dreaming and the difficulty of writing poetry. Graves knows that his

Marvellous hope of achievement
And deeds of ample scope

has been deceived and bereaved, yet he remains full of determination.

Despite its abrupt changes of direction, 'In Procession' is an important poem recapitulating some of the changes of mood and attitude in Graves's poetry from the start of his career up to 1923. The youthful enthusiasm and ambition to follow in the footsteps of the great poets, the energy and fertility of an imagination brimming with ideas but uncertain how to convey them, the growing doubts about a world which is by no means the Delectable Land, and the inglorious recognition that, far from being 'The Prince of all Poetry', he must 'mope, quirk, and holloa' as best he can, all formed stages in the development of the poet.

It is appropriate to turn from 'In Procession' to the 'Interlude: On Preserving a Poetical Formula', and the subsequent 'Epitaph on an Unfortunate Artist', with which Graves divides Whipperginny.[13] The 'Interlude' is intended as a defence against the charge that

> 'There's less and less cohesion
> In each collection
> Of my published poetries',

but it presents in simple terms the poet's assertion that whether he is wrestling with 'fiendish darkness' or darting 'to Mother-skirts of love and peace', these reactions are

> '... all the same stuff really,
> The obverse and reverse, if you look closely,
> Of busy Imagination's new-coined money'.

Clearly this statement is true of the poems in both Country Sentiment and The Pier-Glass, and it accounts for their apparently contradictory moods. It is not, however, an adequate comment upon the new directions in which Graves was trying to progress. Indeed, the witty and closely controlled 'Epitaph' is more telling in this respect:

> 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.

Graves will not be destroyed by allowing his work to become formulaic in this way - in fact, the moral here is akin to that of the Chinese proverb cited in the author's note and previously quoted (Ch.1 p. 67).

13. W (1923), p.38.

His resilience is also the theme of another and better poem, 'A False Report', or 'Angry Samson', as it has been called since 1938.[14] The original title hints at a stance which Graves had assumed in other poems, most notably in 'Goliath and David' : that he is the truth-teller or re-interpreter of inaccurately recorded history. The poem begins with a contemptuous challenge:

> Are they blind, the lords of Gaza,
> That each his fellow urges
> 'Samson the proud is pillow-smothered,'
> They raise mock dirges?

'Pillow-smothered' is particularly apt in that it suggests the humiliation which Samson is supposed to have suffered, and also, perhaps ,his self-indulgent nature. A small child is usually more likely to be smothered by a pillow than an adult, and so this casts aspersions on Samson's strength and makes his pride look foolish. Furthermore, in the context of the biblical account of Samson's betrayal the phrase delicately evokes the extreme treachery of the wife to her husband when he was most vulnerable. It is worth noting that when Graves revised this stanza for the 1938 Collected Poems, his alterations made a substantial improvement. The lines then read:

> Are they blind, the lords of Gaza
> In their strong towers,
> Who declare Samson pillow-smothered
> And stripped of his powers?

The new second line and less convoluted syntax make more sense, for not only do they add to the apparent strength and invincibility of the lords of Gaza, but also Samson's triumph becomes greater and the reversal more complete when, in the last verse, we read that 'the gates of well-walled Gaza' are 'A-clank' to his stride. The use of indirect speech in the third line absorbs it neatly into the structure and flow of the verse, and the new fourth line, stressing Samson's supposed failure of might, is ironic, unlike the original line.

In the remaining two stanzas a number of Samson's heroic deeds are paraded before the 'Philistines and dullards' as evidence of his miraculous strength:

14. Ibid., p.13.

Turn, look with amaze
At my foxes running in your cornfields
With their tails ablaze.

At bloody jawbone, at bees flitting
From the stark lion's hide:
At these, the gates of well-walled Gaza,
Clanking to my stride.

Michael Kirkham says that 'as part of Samson's story the blazing foxes, the ass's jawbone and the swarm of bees are extraordinary but inevitable symbols of poetic renewal - of energy, richness and, in the dead lion swarming with bees, a kind of death and resurrection'.[15] They are, of course, also all details included in the biblical version of Samson's feats. The story of the lion and bees is in Judges 14, vv. 6-8, the foxes appear in Judges 15, v.4, and the bloody jawbone of the ass is mentioned in 15, vv. 15-16. Finally, the destruction of the gates of Gaza is recorded in Judges 16, v.3. It is interesting to see how closely Graves has followed the biblical record, turning it to his own advantage as Kirkham has demonstrated, for he had shown a predilection for this technique as far back as 'In the Wilderness'.[16]

Clearly this episode in biblical history has continued to attract Graves's attention, for in an essay written many years later he sheds further light on the reference to the foxes, telling us that

> though neither toads nor toadstools are mentioned in the Bible, the fantastic story of the three hundred foxes which Samson bound together in pairs, with flaming torches tied to their tails, and let loose among the Philistine cornfields, suggests toadstool intoxication. 'Little foxes' is a widespread name for the edible chanterelle mushroom; and 'little foxes with fire in their tails' might well mean the fox-coloured Palestinian fly-cap. That Samson used fly-cap to intoxicate a war-band of three-hundred men, and sent them to burn the enemy corn, makes good military sense.[17]

Yet, despite the confidence and determination of 'A False Report', Graves still had very mixed views on the value of poetry itself, as the earlier discussion of the title poem, 'Whipperginny', shows.[18] Although more sophisticated than a work like 'Over the Brazier', 'Whipperginny' is not entirely dissimilar from it in attitude. The

15. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.73.
16. OB (1916), p.15.
17. Graves, Difficult Questions, Easy Answers (1972), p.87.
18. See Chapter One, pp.68-9.

witty structure of the poem, recurrent in much of Graves's writing during the period in the 'twenties when he sought greater emotional detachment, is most successful - for example, in 'The Cool Web' - when the intellectual insight is fused with emotion.[19]

'The Cool Web' refers to the web of language by means of which we simultaneously convey our impressions of reality and defend ourselves from overexposure to it. In the opening stanza the poet considers how children lack the language to define their experiences and feelings, whether they are joyous or frightening:

> 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.

Language, it appears, is a means of limiting the extremes of our responses. The pun on 'spell' is intentional, for words are a means of establishing authority over our environment, an age-old idea which is represented in the Bible by the account of Adam being allowed to name the animals. However, Graves sees this as a paradoxical skill, for language may ultimately alienate us from first-hand experience:

> 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.

The poet at once surrenders to experience and records it in the disciplined form of his work, thus avoiding mere 'brininess and volubility'. The successful poem makes us feel its immediacy, and yet, technically, is perfectly controlled. Graves has returned to this idea at intervals throughout his work. In his Clark Lectures, he observed that

> the act of composition occurs in a sort of trance,
> distinguishable from dream only because the critical
> faculties are not dormant, but on the contrary,
> more acute than normally.[20]

Later, in Man Does, Woman Is, he published a poem called 'Dance of Words' which again considers the poet's use of language:[21]

19. P 1914-1926 (1927), pp.215-16.
20. Graves, The Crowning Privilege (1959), p.99.
21. MDWI (1964), p.35.

To make them move, you should start from lightning
And not forecast the rhythm: rely on chance,
Or so-called chance for its bright emergence
Once lightning interpenetrates the dance.

Grant them their own traditional steps and postures
But see they dance it out again and again
Until only lightning is left to puzzle over -
The choreography plain, and the theme plain.

Finally, in 1974, we find Graves still pondering the issue in 'Three Years Waiting' where he asks: [22]

What is a poem
Unless a shot in the night with a blind arrow
From a well-magicked bowstring?

The problem of language is perennial, and although Graves is aware of how it may become an obstacle to communication rather than a facility for promoting it, in 'The Cool Web' he is equally sensitive to our need for speech and words, for

...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.

This is the risk taken by the poet who operates at the frontiers of what man can tolerate, where

...Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still. [23]

'The Cool Web' must rate as one of the most serious and accomplished examinations of the nature and importance of language and of our use of it made by Graves at any stage in his writing. The consciousness of impending chaos and insanity which may break through and wreck our lives recalls 'Essay on Knowledge', as does the philosophical way in which the poet faces up to this possibility. However, Graves's own

22. Graves, At The Gate (1974), p.47.
23. T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets (1959), p.19.

readiness to venture out to the frontiers of human experience beyond which words fail but meanings still exist, as opposed to defining the reality of such frontiers, is problematic, and must be returned to later.

He pursues the theme of language in a number of other poems, paying particular attention to the way in which words become corrupted, and the consequences of this. 'Hell', first published in Poems 1914-1927, is reminiscent of the closing section of 'In Procession', and presents the poet's disillusioned view of the world about him.[24] He imagines that 'the great-devil' seizes up

> Husks, rags and bones, waste-paper, excrement
> Denied a soul whether for good or evil...
>
> ...And words repeated, over and over and over,
> Until their soul sickens and all but dies,
> These the great-devil tenderly as a lover
> Will lay his hands upon and hypnotise.

Out of this miscellaneous rubbish the 'great-devil' 'forms the pavement-feet and the lift-faces':

> He leads the sick words into parliament
> To rule a dust-bin world with deep-sleep phrases.

The vision here recalls the conclusion to The Dunciad, and the alienation suggested by the references to 'pavement-feet and the lift-faces' recurs in other poems of this period by Graves, such as 'The Legs' and 'Sandhills'. Moreover, the poem reflects the influence of Laura Riding both in terms of the idea behind it - that so-called common life is merely sterile and misdirected servitude to the 'great myth' - and in its harsh tone which shares the mood of a work like 'The Quids', where Miss Riding tells how

> Each quid stirred.
> The united quids
> Waved through a sinuous decision.
> The quids, that had never done anything before
> But be, be, be, be, be -
> The quids resolved to predicate,
> To dissipate themselves in grammar.[25]

24. P 1914-1927 (1927), pp.218-20.
25. Laura Riding, Selected Poems (1970), p.46.

The effect of the corruption of language upon genuine attempts to communicate is to render every statement suspect. When language has been levelled by the quids, or the 'great-devil', then,

> When living words and men meet, two and two
> In this one-twentieth part still actual scene,
> They exchange pinches at their 'How d'ye do?'
> For a punctilious 'Do you mean what you mean? '

Not only is there distrust, but the words of good men are swept up by the 'great-devil' to 'feed his false five-thousands day by day'. 'Hell' is a very pessimistic poem for in it Graves virtually discounts the possibility of genuine, unperverted communication. It leads Michael Kirkham to say that 'the poet... reveals his intention to dissociate himself from his subject-matter'.[26]

The theme of the debasement of language is continued in 'History of the Word' (1930), which traces how 'The Word that in the beginning was the Word' became so overlaid by other words found to interpret it that ultimately there evolved 'the various tongue-tied Lexicon'.[27] This stage corresponds to the 'brininess and volubility' mentioned in 'The Cool Web', and it leads the poet to anticipate that the time is nearing

> When every ear shall lose his sense of hearing
> And every mind by deafness be close shuttered -
> But two or three, where first the Word was uttered.

The 'two or three' are 'inside people', to use Laura Riding's term, and the fact that Graves admits their exemption from the general failure of language indicates a small growth of confidence since 'Hell'.

We have seen that even in early poems like 'Rocky Acres' and 'Ghost Raddled' Graves thought of the poet as one who lives on the fringes of society, rejecting the blindness and lack of integrity common to the majority of his fellow-men. It is hardly surprising that as he grew to reject the idea of writing to please the reader, and came increasingly to regard poetry as an expression of truth upon which most people turn their backs, Graves felt it necessary to admit his inevitable isolation and to define his independence. 'The Dead Ship' makes the definition in stark and gloomy tones of resignation.[28] The poet ironically describes himself as 'overmasterful', thus suggesting that

26. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.119.
27. TPM (1930), p.2.
28. P 1914-1927 (1927), pp.220-21.

he has expected too much from life. Now he prepared to travel onwards in a ship of Death in Life - and the echoes of 'The Ancient Mariner' are unmistakeable:

> So, overmasterful, to sea !
> But hope no distant view of sail,
> No growling ice, nor weed, nor whale,
> Nor breakers perilous on the lee.

He denies himself the right to imagine adventure or romance, unlike Keats, whose 'perilous' in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is recalled by the fourth line. On board the dead ship nothing can disturb the wake that 'runs evenly behind'. The voyage is meaningless and inescapable bound by the laws of time, and the poet's only merit is his recognition and acceptance of this sombre and hopeless fact:

> And it has width enough for you,
> This vessel, dead from truck to keel
> With an ignoble random wheel,
> A blank chart and a surly crew.

Time is thus presented as the ultimate arbiter in all things, and no value can withstand it.

The self-discipline and acceptance which Graves appears to achieve without difficulty in 'The Dead Ship' were themselves a recurrent cause of conflict in him. This has already been seen in 'To the Galleys' where he urged the need for spartan standards, and it reappears in 'In No Direction'.[29] Here he reveals his difficulty in not submitting to pressures and temptations that urge him away from his determination to follow no preconceived direction:

> To go in no direction
> Surely as carelessly
> Walking on hills alone
> Was never found easy.
>
> Neither to send leaf or stick
> Twirling in the air
> Whose fall may be prophetic
> Pointing 'there'.

The strain of remaining independent and of upholding his isolated position outweighs the pleasure Graves felt for the same reasons in

29. P 1929 (1929), p.2.

another poem also published in 1929: [30]

> And glad to find, on again looking at it,
> It was not nearly so good as I had thought -
> You know the ship is moving when you see
> The boxes on the quayside sliding away
> And growing smaller - and having real delight
> When the port's cleared and the coast out of sight,
> And ships are few, each on its proper course,
> With no occasion for approach or discourse.

The easy, almost casual, movement of these lines, and the way in which the poem opens in mid-stream, like the experience it describes, give 'Quayside' (later called 'A Former Attachment') the poise and aptness characteristic of Graves's mature work. The image is at once illuminating and precise, even to the point of reflecting the literal journey from England made by the poet in the same year.

Another interesting definition of Graves's attitude to himself is found in the idiosyncratic emblem of the cabbage-white butterfly in 'Flying Crooked' : [31]

> The butterfly, the cabbage-white,
> (His honest idiocy of flight)
> Will never now, it is too late,
> Master the art of flying straight,
> Yet has - who knows so well as I ? -
> A just sense of how not to fly:
> He lurches here and here by guess
> And God and hope and hopelessness.
> Even the aerobatic swift
> Has not his flying-crooked gift.

On the one hand this is a good-natured joke against himself, but on the other, Graves is making a wittily serious reflection upon the nature of his own talent. He studiously avoids speed and spectacular gestures, but this is compensated for by his honesty and sound knowledge which, in their homely way, are consistent with the spirit of true poetry. The description of the butterfly's extraordinarily erratic, lurching flight gives the impression that he flies, as the poet writes, because of a fundamental, untrained intuition. The swift is fast and sensational,

30. Ibid., p.26.
31. P 1926-1930 (1931), p.41.

the butterfly slow and singular, but sure.

In his poems of the 'thirties Graves often voices a new optimism and faith in the future, both of which can be related to the influence of Laura Riding upon him. An early expression of his growing confidence comes in 'Largesse to the Poor', where he tells of his past restlessness, and of the series of temporary stopping places he furnished for himself, only to abandon them soon after:

> Most happy when most sure that no contentment
> Might ever last in God's own time
> Unless to be death-numb, as I would not. [32]

Yet despite his rejection of stability, he always kept a hold on the past, 'Leaving behind goods plainly mine', thus, perhaps, suggesting that he attempted to safeguard his return at a later date should he so wish. The pivotal point in the poem is in the third stanza, for here he claims to have found a new, fuller and more satisfying start to life:

> 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 gesture of throwing away his keys, the links with his past, indicates his wish for a permanent break with his previous way of life, and a new faith in the future. If there is a hint of arrogance in this action, it is consistent with the tone of 'Quayside': the poor are those he has left behind, the people who do not dare to desert a humdrum existence, and who will not risk losing the half-loaf of which they are sure. The poet has risked losing all, and now leads us to believe that he has gained immeasurably by taking this chance.

Hauteur and self-assurance reappear in 'The Cloak', first published in the 1938 Collected Poems. [33] Here the poet is personified as a nobleman in self-imposed exile in France. The poem is written as though it is based on a report of an interview given by the gentleman's valet. The polite but unrevealing replies to the questions put to him capture perfectly the suave tone of answers given by a good press officer:

32. TWE? (1931), p.1.
33. CP (1938), p.159.

This nobleman is at home anywhere,
His castle being, the valet says, his title.
The cares of an estate would incommode
Such tasks as now his Lordship has in hand.
His Lordship, says the valet, contemplates
A profitable absence of some years.

The disdain emerges more clearly in the fact that the Lord neither has nor wants a friend at Court to intercede for him, exile being

... but another name
For an old habit of non-residence
In all but the recesses of his cloak.
It was this angered a great personage.

This conclusion is as abrupt as it is unexpected. The nobleman's non-conformity, his lack of attachment to the kind of tradition outlined in 'A Country Mansion', has made him an offender. He has refused to subscribe to socially accepted patterns of behaviour, and recognizes that isolation and exile are necessary for a life committed to personal convictions and values. As in 'Largesse to the Poor' and 'Quayside', there is no bitterness. Rather, the contempt he feels for those at Court is convincingly suggested by the dismissive tone of the last line, and the deliberate refusal to enlarge upon it.

In addition to growing faith in the correctness of his decision to exile himself in Majorca, the other major development in Graves's beliefs about poetry during the 'thirties was the increasing importance he placed upon the dedication of the poet to the muse. The background to this has already been discussed elsewhere, and a number of poems illustrating the point have been cited. However, as Graves clarified his view of the nature of the muse and of the poet's relationship to her, one finds that two of his favourite themes come together. Thus poems about poetry tend to become poems about the muse, which in turn are often love poems; and love is perhaps the theme for which Graves's work is best known. This was seen in 'Against Kind', 'To Whom Else?' and 'The Ages of Oath'. It is also evident in 'To the Sovereign Muse', which shows how until the muse - here clearly referring to Laura Riding - came, the poet and his friend had evaluated the merits of other poets. [34] She, however,

34. Ibid., p.180.

...plucked the speech-thread from a jargon-tangled
Fleece of a thousand tongues, wills, voices,
To be a single speech, twisted fine...

The arrival of the muse brings light and direction to the work and lives of her followers. She cannot be ignored or rejected - to do so is suicidal for the poet. Dedication to her admits the poet-lover to a vision of truth, as the rebellious young warrior in 'The Challenge' found when he surrendered himself to the 'reasoned look' of the Moon.[35] As another poem puts it, the muse comes secretly, 'like snow in a dark night', and as for some the dazzling light reflected from snow is too bright, so also is the muse, and she may be wilfully shut out. But, again like snow, she is

... warmer than fingers feared,
And to soil friendly;
Holding the histories of the night
In yet unmelted tracks.[36]

Poems like these may rightly be described as love poems, but because they concern the muse, and because the muse is the poet's source of inspiration, they are also about poetry itself as Robert Graves understands it.

It must,however, be added that love poems have not always been associated with the muse in his work, and it is instructive to trace the ancestry of poems such as 'The Age of Oath' and 'Like Snow' from a further point of view.

35. Ibid., pp.176-78.
36. Ibid., p.183.

Part Two: Love.

An early example of Graves's love poetry is 'Oh, and Oh! '. [37] There the poet celebrates his ideal and perfect love by contrasting it with the revulsion he experiences on seeing other courting couples. In doing so, he seems to lose all sense of proportion and his eagerness to dissociate himself from such behaviour raises certain doubts in the mind of the reader:

Down dirty streets in stench and smoke
The pale townsfolk
Crawl and kiss and cuddle,
In doorways hug and huddle;
Loutish he
And sluttish she
In loathsome love together press
And unbelievable ugliness.
These spiders spin a loathly woof !

The Skeltonic form is used to satirize urban pollution of which the 'pale townsfolk' are an active part. The poet's attitude is priggish, class-conscious and moralistic, though the basis of his disapproval is undermined by the reference to 'unbelievable ugliness', which makes it seem as if the lovers' real crime is a failure to appeal to his visual tastes. The problem is that, for all his disgust, the poet is obviously fascinated, and indeed this seems to add to the intensity of his disgust. The predominance of 'c', 'd', and 's' sounds in these lines reverberates with feeling and underlines the stress produced in him by the sight. This contrasts with the soft vowel sounds which mould the sense of the last two lines:

My love is sick;
Far away lives my darling

- and remove his loved one out of the contamination of physical contact. However, despite his claim to 'walk aloof', there is more credibility in the description of his

Head burning and heart snarling,
Tread feverish quick.

The poet's love - or infatuation - is not for a woman but for an ideal, and his response is that of a boy outraged though intrigued by what he regards as the compromises made upon it. Indeed, we believe in the

37. OB (1916), p.16.

reality of the 'pale townsfolk' more easily than we do in the poet's 'darling'. This ambiguous attitude towards the physical was ingrained in the poet as a child. In Goodbye To All That he records his horror at seeing boys much older than himself swimming naked at one of his preparatory schools, and also his embarrassment when, at the age of seventeen, a girl made overtures to him.[38] Even in his mature love poetry Graves remains fascinated by moments of simultaneous attraction and revulsion. The difference, however, is that here he cannot accept what he feels; he protests too loudly because he is frightened by his own fascination; whereas in the later poetry Graves learnt to accept this revulsion as part of the complex feelings of love.

The Treasure Box - the volume of poetry which succeeded Fairies and Fusiliers - contains six poems and 'Four Rhymes from "The Penny Fiddle" ', and apart from a rearrangement of the latter for Whipperginny, these reappear almost without change in the 1921 collection, The Pier-Glass.[39] Four of the poems deserve particular attention because they deal with the fluctuating relationships between men and women - a major theme in Graves's mature work - in a way that anticipates ideas later included in the White Goddess mythology.

The least distinguished of these poems, 'Catherine Drury', adopts the dialogue-form especially favoured by the poet in his next collection, Country Sentiment (1920).[40] The dialogue is between the mother and sister of Edward, who has fallen in love with Catherine Drury. The mother's opening observation on the oddity of Edward's behaviour - that he is not interested in food and drink - describes a conventional symptom of love-sickness. But he is also irritable and surly - 'flings me answers gruff and rude' - and his mother cannot understand this, while the sister warns her against trying to know

> All that moves in Edward's heart,
> The fiery gloom he will not show.

The paradoxical nature of Edward's feelings is indicated in the phrase 'fiery gloom'. 'Fiery' suggests the intensity of his emotions, but 'gloom' makes them seem sinister, even threatening, an idea supported by the next two lines spoken by the sister:

38. GBTAT (1929), p.40.
39. TB (1919).
40. Ibid., p.4.

For you and he who lay so near
Fall wide apart.

Ironically, Edward's passion is divisive and dangerous for them both. The disruption of the relationship between mother and son is reflected in the shortened line, 'Fall wide apart', and the poem goes on to speak of Catherine Drury as the mother's 'rival'. There is further irony in the fact that Catherine herself

... does not guess
His dark love or your envious fear,
Her own loveliness.

Edward's sister predicts that Catherine's unintentional cruelty as she laughs and plays will 'melt away' his heart, and that if he thinks his mother understands, 'He'll growl, as 'twere, and bite your hand'. In The Pier-Glass, this line was altered to read 'Better you had been stone blind', which is more satisfactory in both sense and structure.[41] Edward is a prototype of the poet-lover and servant of the muse goddess central to much of Graves's later work. He is the victim of unrequited love, obliged to suffer, while Catherine anticipates the cruel, indifferent aspect of the goddess herself. Love here is negative, for not only is Edward made miserable by Catherine, but the affection between mother and son is jeopardized. It is not a phenomenon with which the people concerned can come to terms.

The uncontrollable anguish of love is also the theme of the opening poem in The Treasure Box, 'Morning Phoenix'.[42] Here the poet sees himself at the centre of forces which simultaneously consume him from within and from without:

In my body lives a flame,
Flame that burns me all the day,
When a fierce sun does the same,
I am charred away.

He is defenceless, and longs for caves

... and cold rocks,
Minnow-peopled country brooks,
Blundering gales of Equinox,
Sunless valley-nooks,

but the poem makes it clear that his wish is unfulfilled. The landscapes

41. PG (1921), p.24.
42. TB (1919), p.3.

in Graves's poetry usually reflect a particular state of mind and emotion, and 'Morning Phoenix' is not an exception. The wind, shade and rivers appeal to him because of their restorative and refreshing qualities. They would enable him to revitalise his 'Calcined heart and shrivelled skin', and to rise from his own ashes, like the phoenix. This striking poem attains new intensity of feeling, as is suggested by the accumulation of phrases such as 'charred away' 'Roasted so in heart and hide', 'scorched by love', 'Calcined heart and shrivelled skin'. At the same time the vocabulary is simple and concise, showing the poet's detailed awareness of his predicament, even if he is unable to see a way out of it. It is important to remember that the poem was published in 1919, a fact overlooked by Michael Kirkham and Douglas Day, both of whom treat it as though it first appeared in 1921 in The Pier-Glass. Indeed, Kirkham goes so far as to comment that

> the love poetry since Country Sentiment has become more intense. The theme is still 'the pains of love', but it is presented now without charm or coyness. The poet's problems have forced themselves uncompromisingly into the centre of the picture, and he can no longer assume that they can be wished or flattered away.[43]

But Country Sentiment did not come out until 1920, and The Treasure Box was issued in 1919. 'Morning Phoenix' has therefore an added significance in that it pre-dates the main period during which Graves began to face up to the pressure of his feelings.

Having been dropped from all collections after The Pier-Glass, an interestingly revised version of the poem, now called 'Song: A Phoenix Flame', appeared in 1964 in Man Does, Woman Is.[44] Not only has the new version been reduced by four lines, but the movement of the poem is more strictly controlled, and the sense has altered in emphasis:

> In my heart a phoenix flame
> Darts and scorches me all day -
> Should a fierce sun do the same,
> I die away.

The 'phoenix flame' is now an established fact within the poet, whereas

43. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), pp.55-6.
44. MDWI (1964), p.31.

in the earlier poem,he imagined how, in the right circumstances, he might become like a phoenix, able to survive his internal and external anguish. In the 1964 version, the 'fierce sun', symbolising the unhappiness caused him by his lover, is only a subject for contemplation, not something he actually experiences. The poet says that if his own resurgent flame of love was accompanied by 'a fierce sun' scorching him, this would destroy him. The finality of the destruction, suggested by the short fourth line, leaves the reader with a sense of sudden termination. He continues to long for the same kind of cool, refreshing landscape described in the original poem, and concludes with the question:

Who could boast a careless wit,
    Doubly roasted, heart and hide,
Turning on the Sun's red spit,
    Consumed inside ?

Love is still felt to be an intense, perhaps even a devastating experience, as it was in 'Morning Phoenix', but the poet does not find himself as totally tormented as he did in the first case. In the early poem there was no relief for the writer, whereas in the 1964 version he considers how vulnerable he would be if he were 'Doubly roasted' both from within and from without. It is as though the poet has learnt to live with himself in a different world, accepting the limitations to his contentment, but grateful that they are not more severe.

Another poem, part of which has been republished recently, is 'The Kiss', and in it Graves explores the ambiguous nature of love.[45] The 'whisper of love' mentioned in the first stanza elevates the lover to an ideal moment in which he stands outside time and his beloved assumes all embracing significance:

Spell-bound to a word
    Does Time cease to move,
Till her calm grey eye
    Expands to a sky
And the clouds of her hair
    Like storms go by?

45. TB (1919), pp.7-8.

It is this stanza, delicately defining an awe-inspiring moment of relationship, that has been reprinted under the title 'Fragment' in More Poems 1961.[46] 'The Kiss', however, proceeds to show how transient the experience is, for the attempt to endorse the timeless moment by physical contact serves only to destroy it, leaving 'void and dearth':

Then the lips that you have kissed
Turn to frost and fire,
And a white-steaming mist
Obscures desire.

The reference to 'frost and fire' - like Edward's 'fiery gloom' in Catherine Drury' - reflects the paradoxical and rapidly changing nature of love. This awareness of fluctuating moods has its origins, as has been shown, right back in the early poem, 'Oh, and Oh! '. Following the initial moment of glory, the experience described in 'The Kiss', is one of disillusionment and painful discovery. The poet asks:

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.

Consummation of the anticipatory desire, culminating in a timeless moment with permanent value, leads to renewed separation which is all the more shattering because of what preceded it. Michael Kirkham has noted, too, that the image of emptiness and impoverishment evoked here is similar to the poet's feeling as a victim of neurasthenia.[47] Both in matters of love and in terms of his own re-adjustment to peace, disappointment and difficulty became dominant themes in Graves's poetry of the 'twenties.

This is evident again in 'Lost Love', the one poem from The Treasure Box to have been published in every collected edition so far.[48] The man's grief for his lost love is said to have 'quickened' his senses, with the result that

46. MP 1961 (1961), p.9.
47. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.56.
48. TB (1919), p.9.

He can watch a grass or leaf
Every instant grow; he can
Clearly through a flint wall see,
Or watch the startled spirit flee
From the throat of a dead man.

Heightened powers of perception are, in legend, associated with heroes or seers,and, in terms of the poet's own mythology of later years, yield the sort of insight which is the reward given to the dedicated servant of the White Goddess.

Not only is the poet's vision intensified; his hearing is also alerted , and in what are possibly the finest lines in the poem, we learn what this means:

Clamour rings in his sad ear;
And noise so slight it would surpass
Credence:- drinking sound of grass,
Worm talk, clashing jaws of moth
Chumbling holes in cloth.

The imagination is readily stimulated by the way in which familiar sounds are given unusual sources, and the archaic dialect word 'chumbling' creates a successful onomatopoeic effect. We derive a clear understanding of the kind of disporportion which the poet is experiencing. His predicament is ambiguous, for he is at once 'god-like or like thief', and he wanders

Inside and out, below, above,
Without relief, seeking lost love.

As in 'Morning Phoenix', there is no solution and he is apparently condemned to perpetual restlessness.

These four poems are all the more remarkable in that they precede Country Sentiment, where many poems are characterised by the romanticism and idealism associated with earlier collections. Indeed, in this respect Graves's next volume seems to be a retrograde step from the achievement of The Treasure Box.

The ballad poems, 'A Frosty Night', 'The Cupboard', and 'Apples and Water' - all published in Country Sentiment - have already been discussed in the context of Graves's development as a poet. Although they are on the subject of love, they can scarcely be called 'love poems' as such. Personal emotion is largely excluded from them, and

indeed this seems to have contributed to their success in a volume where the poet's attempts to deal with private emotion tend to become sentimental. A typical example of failure is 'One Hard Look', the theme of which is that small commonplace events can have large consequences.[49] The point is illustrated by a series of examples which culminate in a piece of special pleading by the poet with his woman. The opening stanzas are vivid, and show a delicacy of imagination that is reminiscent of some of Emily Dickinson's work:

> Small gnats that fly
> In hot July
> And lodge in sleeping ears,
> Can rouse therein
> A trumpet's din
> With Day-of-Judgement fears.

The lines succeed because they are a precise emblem of the idea Graves wants to convey. The small size of the gnats does not prevent them causing great unpleasantness, given the right circumstances, and the reference to 'Day-of-Judgment fears' makes plain the severity of the consequences. The moral tone is almost biblical. Once again, though on a more limited scale than in 'Vain and Careless' or 'Goliath and David', the poet's image enables him to express a personal feeling without becoming merely private. In comparison with this the weakness of the last verse is apparent:

> 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.

The tone of these lines is much more subjective and gravitates towards self-pity. They lack the pictorial clarity of the earlier verse, and compromise the mood of the poem as a whole.

On the other hand, in 'Vain and Careless' Graves was wholly effective in his exploration of the dilemma caused by pride and coolness in love.[50] This is a nursery-rhyme, and in common with many other poems in that vein, it tells a moral tale. The careless lady who gave her child away, and the man who was

49. CS (1920), p.21.
50. Ibid., p.59.

So vain and so proud,
He walked on stilts
To be seen by the crowd,

are striking images of the weaknesses they represent. Indeed, they do more than represent carelessness and vanity; they are these very qualities. Since this is so, the poet is able to present his moral point - that vain and careless people are incompatible - in the form of a dramatic confrontation between the two figures, the outcome of which ironically disappoints the expectations of the enthusiastic townsfolk:

'A splendid match surely,'
Neighbours saw it plain,
'Although she is so careless,
Although he is so vain.'

But the lady played bobcherry,
Did not see or care,
As the vain man went by her
Aloft in the air.

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

Kirkham has rightly drawn attention to the mocking tone created by the varied rhythms, the short and succinct balanced against the relaxed and flowing. This is seen, for example, in the crispness of the lines 'Did not see or care' and 'Aloft in the air', where the consequences of vanity and carelessness are precisely formulated, and the contrast with the easy movement of the other two lines in the stanza in which the complacency and indifference of the man and woman are suggested. The irony reaches its climax in the last stanza with its witty description of them as a 'gentle-born couple' who 'Lived and died apart'. Gentility, it is implied, precludes intimacy, and they are a couple in their isolation rather than in marriage. As with the ballad-poems, a positive aspect of 'Vain and Careless' is its freedom from the complication of personal emotion.

To complete the discussion of poems with a love theme in Country Sentiment, it is necessary to mention an example of the work Graves himself described as 'romantic love in a country setting'.[51] He

51. CP (1938), p.xx.

quoted 'Loving Henry' as a representative piece in this vein, as indeed it is.[52] Modelled on a form of question and answer nursery-poetry, it uses the simplicity of diction and irregularity of line typical of such verse:

Henry, Henry, do you love me,
Do you love me truly?
Oh, Mary, must I say again
My love's a pain,
A torment most unruly,
It tosses me
Like a ship at sea
When the storm rages fully.

The rhythms are those of speech, and the form is capable of supporting simple feeling of this kind. There is no attempt to analyse his pain, which is described in a conventional way, and the strengths and weaknesses of writing in this style are that while the form suits a direct statement of emotion, it does not permit a detailed investigation of it. This, however, is symptomatic of Graves's state at the time, for, as his enthusiasm for nursery-poetry implies, he himself was not ready to surrender to complicated emotions.

The pains of love shaped the four poems from The Treasure Box discussed above, and in this respect they are similar to most of the other love poems published for the first time in The Pier-Glass. For example, 'The Hills of May' is a fanciful piece, yet has a sombre note at the end, thus recalling an attitude often expressed in Walter De La Mare's poetry.[53] The poem is written in four-line stanzas, and apart from the first stanza, the last line of each is shortened to create a deliberately truncated effect suggesting the poet's disappointment and loss. The woman, personified as the Wind, comes to the man, choosing him for her lover, and apparently allowing him to act freely with her. There are warnings of what is to follow as we read in the second stanza that the poet is

Careless though the daisies redden,
Though the sun frown.

It is a quaint idea to imagine the daisies reddening with embarrassment or indignation at the irresponsibility of the poet in dealing with his scornful, proud and calm lover. Once more, with hindsight, we can see

52. CS (1920), p.35.
53. PG (1921), p.45.

in the Wind traits that we now associate with the White Goddess. She rejects 'Lesser love' than the poet's 'cool spiritual embracing' and 'gentle kiss', but her indifference and detachment are unqualified:

So she walked, the proud lady,
So danced or ran,
So she loved with a calm heart,
Neglecting man...

Fade, fail innocent stars
On the green of May:
She has left our bournes for ever,
Too fine to stay.

The emotion is regret, but there is no bitterness or protest, and the poet does not appear to regard the loss of love as unjust. On other occasions he is filled with a sense of his own guilt but here is aware of the immense superiority of 'the proud lady', whose indifference recalls the lady in 'Vain and Careless'. The reference to the stars in the concluding stanza also brings to mind another poem, 'Reproach', that deals with unhappy love, but from a different point of view.[54]

It is more intense and moving than 'The Hills of May', and brings together the two main themes of The Pier-Glass, the loss of love - in this instance, the love of God - and a feeling of guilt. Moreover, the poem is interrogative and self-searching, which is typical of the mood of the volume. Here the poet feels himself reproached, but is unable to understand why he is guilty. The accuser is described as having a 'grieving moonlight face', so, as elsewhere, the lunar association is with sorrow. Added to this are the facts that he or she is

Crowned with a spiny bramble-crown,
Dew-dropped with evening tears,

which suggest a Christ-like quality. The reproach itself is wordless, and this increases its haunting power over the poet:

Untrue? but how, what broken oath?
Unkind? I know not even your name.
Unkind, untrue, you charge me both,
Scalding my heart with shame.

54. Ibid., p.17.

The black trees shudder, dropping snow,
The stars tumble and spin.
Speak, speak, or how may a child know
His ancestral sin?

The reference to 'ancestral sin' hints that the poet regards himself as the victim of Original Sin for which he cannot atone and yet for which he is held answerable. The description of the stars spinning and of the black trees shuddering and dropping snow, gives the impression of a hostile and chaotic universe where there is no effective benign force.

However, it is not until the publication of Whipperginny in 1925 that love replaces neurasthenia as the poet's central preoccupation. In this collection the development in his response to love and its difficulties can be followed through several phases. 'A Lover Since Childhood's is whimsical and self-pitying, with the poet lamenting the cruelty of his beloved. [55] It is reminiscent of features in a number of earlier poems and may be taken as a successor to them. There are similarities both of mood and of specific words to 'Lost Love'. For example, the following lines in 'A Lover Since Childhood' -

Wander aloof do I
Lean over gates and sigh,
Making friends with the bee and the butterfly?

and

Walking so miserably,
Wanting relief in the friendship of flower or tree

bring to mind the conclusion of 'Lost Love', where we read:

This man is quickened so with grief,
He wanders god-like or like thief
Inside and out, below, above,
Without relief seeking lost love.

The final injunction to the unkind woman in 'A Lover Since Childhood' - 'Swallow your pride, let us be as we used to be' - touches upon an idea that was recurrent in The Pier-Glass, namely that pride is a destructive and hurtful quality, while the tone of the plea is like that at the end of 'One Hard Look'. The title is interesting, for it implies that the poet's loss of love is one aspect of his growth away from the security and happiness of earlier days.

In 'The Ridge-Top', later retitled 'Love in Barrenness', Graves renewed the attempt to create an image of his release from suffering and discovery of love, but again the conclusion is disappointingly unconvincing.[56] The first ten lines describe a desolate landscape of a kind that has much in common with 'Rocky Acres'. The 'lost curlew' mourns, and the mountains are snow-capped:

> Even the long dividing plain
> Showed no wealth of sheep or grain
> But fields of boulders lay like corn
> And raven's croak was shepherd's horn.

It is a successfully drawn picture of bleakness and sterility, but the poem then strikes out in a new and unexpected direction:

> The North Wind rose; I saw him press
> With lusty force against your dress,
> Moulding your body's inward grace,
> And streaming off from your set face;
> So now no longer flesh and blood,
> But poised in marble thought you stood
> O wingless Victory, loved of men,
> Who could withstand your triumph then?

Graves has endeavoured to use the figure of the woman caught in a particular attitude by the wind to symbolize a moment of vision and insight when he realises that she is at once human and more than human, irresistible yet inaccessible, a source of redemption, but victorious over those who love her. His amazement and sense of paradox are familiar reactions, but the problem for the reader of 'The Ridge Top' is that the woman exists in such a shadowy and pallid way that it is hard to appreciate the symbolic richness upon which the poet is exclaiming. The failure is not unlike that already indicated in the early poem, 'Oh, and Oh! ' If the symbol was intended as a distancing technique, it has worked all too well in that respect without being simultaneously illuminating.

The image of a haunted house had appeared in a poem in Country Sentiment, and also was important in 'The Pier-Glass'. It is revived in 'The Red Ribbon Dream', which begins by telling of the poet standing in a timeless limbo before an 'unreal door/Painted on the plaster of a ten-foot wall'.[57] The description of him as 'Dazed for the memory of a lost desire' suggests his feeling of alienation from parts of himself as

56. Ibid., p.6.
57. Ibid., pp.27-8.

well as from others. This self-doubt is then dispelled by the voice which calls him, giving him both direction and the ability to follow. The room that he enters exudes love and comfort:

> The cushions were friendship and the chairs were love,
> Shaggy with love was the great wolf skin,

but the girl he meets has all the ambiguity of Coleridge's Geraldine or, as Kirkham says, the Fatal Woman of late nineteenth-century literature: [58]

> Love went before me: it was shining now
> From the eyes of a girl by the window wall,
> Whose beauty I knew to be fate and all
> By the thin red ribbon on her calm brow.
>
> Then I was a hero and a bold boy
> Kissing the hand I had never yet kissed;
> I felt red ribbon like a snake twist
> In my own thick hair, so I laughed for joy.

The poet's joy as he embraces the woman is qualified by his awareness of her destructive or fickle nature and this may be symptomatic of the growing scepticism and capacity for self-mockery characteristic of a number of poems in Whipperginny. She is welcoming but not submissive, giving but dominant. In fact, these are also the qualities of the White Goddess, and although Graves has always argued his belief in her on the basis of evidence found in ancient lore and myth, it is interesting to speculate whether the literary femme fatale of the last century had any part in shaping his view of her. As we had been led to expect, the poet's encounter is short-lived, and the poem ends with him once more standing 'by the stair-head in the upper hall', though now there seems no further chance of remission. It is an unusual piece for Graves in that the apparent relief he finds is shown to be false. More often he is seen to end either with a false resolution, as in a poem like 'The Rock Below', or else in a mood of hopelessness with no hint of relief (e.g. 'Down'). His presentation here of the betrayal of a hope that was never really credible to him, although he embraced it, is a new and more subtle conclusion.

We find further evidence of the complexity developing in Graves's response to experience in 'Old Wives' Tales'. [59] This poem, later revised and retitled 'Mermaid, Dragon, Fiend', deals less with love than with man's lusts, represented by 'the mermaid kin', the dragons

58. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves, (1969), p.61.
59. W (1923), pp.21-2.

of his despair, and his ungodly longings which are characterised as the fiend. In the original version, the poet starts by questioning whether the exaggerated stories he was told as a child, and which he soon learned to mock, were merely 'Random tags'. Subsequent events have led him to realise that the grotesque mermaids, dragons and fiends of the stories are fictional only in terms of the physical details attributed to them. This in no way reduces the lusts and feelings symbolized by the monsters; indeed, the converse is true, as we find, for example, in the account of the fiend:

> And there's a true and only fiend
> Worse than prophets prophesy,
> Whose full powers to hurt are screened
> Lest the race of men should die.

It is this kind of perception, close to Eliot's view that mankind can only tolerate a little truth, that reappears in poems like 'The Cool Web' later in the decade. In its present context it is valuable to see the poet returning to childhood memories, not as a means of escaping the trials of adult life, but in order to reassess the implications of things which, heard as a child he had misunderstood or underrated. He is, as it were, discovering what he already knew. If this idea appears paradoxical or, more precisely, if it suggests that the poet's insight in 'Old Wives' Tales' is paradoxical, then it returns us to an attitude evident in other poems in Whipperginny.

Paradox is also basic to a fine poem, 'Song of Contrariety', where the poet explores the unaccountable flux of love, with its power to dislocate perspective and rational balance:[60]

> Far away is close at hand,
> Close joined is far away,
> Love might come at your command
> Yet will not stay.

The emphasis on the apparent illogicality of love anticipates poems like 'The Terraced Valley'. The poet has found that love cannot be forced or guaranteed. It is important that only in his 'dream-despair' did the woman come close to him and lie complaisant:

> Yet now her flesh and blood consent
> In waking hours of day,
> Joy and passion both are spent,
> Fading clean away.

60. Ibid., p.5.

Graves feels that he has lost the reality and pleasure of love since becoming married to the woman, and that the vision in his 'dream-despair' has been betrayed. He has neither answer nor explanation, and the concluding question conveys a moving sense of loneliness and sadness:

Is the presence empty air,
Is the spectre clay,
That Love, lent substance by despair,
Wanes, and leaves you lonely there
On the bridal day?

Disarmingly honest and unwilling to insist upon an answer, the 'Song of Contrariety', is, as Kirkham says, 'more representative of the new mood making its first appearance in this volume'.[61] One might add that, as with 'Whipperginny', the influence of the metaphysical poets may be detected. In particular, one recalls Marvell's description of his love 'begotten by despair/Upon Impossibility'. There had not been any obvious metaphysical influence upon Graves's verse before this collection and it seems fair to attribute its appearance to the increasing popularity of these writers at that time, largely owing to T.S. Eliot, and also to the development of the poet's own attitude of uncertainty and challenge. It also indicates that part of Graves's mentality which was drawn soon after to Laura Riding's writings. The simplicity of diction, disciplined emotion, and gentle irony directed against the writer himself are all features of the mature poet's work. Together they achieve that apparent contradiction, emotionally charged impersonality, which is a hallmark of good poetry.

'Sullen Moods' is a less well-balanced poem, as its dominant mood is one of self-accusation for the failure to achieve a perfect relationship.[62] He tells his love that his moods are not infidelities, but

Mere indignation at my own
Shortcomings, plagues, uncertainties.

The complexity of his feelings leads him to count her 'at last as wholly me,/ Lover no longer nor yet friend', but this equivocation assumes a more abrasive and cynical tone in the next verse:

Friendship is flattery, though close hid;
Must I then flatter my own mind?
And must (which laws of shame forbid)
Blind love to you make self-love blind?

61. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.62.
62. W (1923), pp.11-2.

It is instructive to compare the tone of this verse with that in the 'Song of Contrariety'. In both instances, the poet questions himself and his relationship, but in 'Sullen Moods' he is unable to master his own feelings of guilt at failure in love, and the result is the cold, self-punitive, rather high-handed tone of the lines that have been quoted. His real vulnerability is revealed in the closing verses, where he is seen to be heavily dependent on the woman and totally lacking in self-reliance. The woman, in fact, is a variation of the girl in 'The Red Ribbon Dream' and 'The Ridge-Top', a desperately desired symbol of perfection and comfort:

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.

The 'Song of Contrariety' ended with a recognition of uncertainty. 'Sullen Moods' also deals with an unresolved difficulty, but it implies a ready-made solution, which the 'Song of Contrariety' did not. It is a poem expressing a wish, and a refusal to accept a predicament, whereas the 'Song of Contrariety' is a description of failure and the question to which it leads. As a result, 'Sullen Moods' shows less self-awareness on the part of the poet, and suffers accordingly.

Perhaps it is in 'Children of Darkness' more than in any other poem in Whipperginny that we find a forceful expression of the paradoxical nature of life as Graves saw it.[63] The idea here is that day-light is associated with uncertainty and doubt, whereas night is the time of decisive action. Thus it is under cover of 'lusty dark' that procreation takes place. Sexual intercourse is referred to as 'the kiss' - a metaphor used previously in the poem of the same name published in The Treasure Box. Conception having taken place in the darkness, 'This night-seed knew no discontent', but nevertheless,

Though there were veils about his face,
With forethought, even in that pent place,
Down towards the light his way he bent
To kingdoms of more ample space.

63. Ibid., p.14.

The paradox and irony is that the intuitive certainty of the 'night-seed' in seeking daylight gives way to doubt and unhappiness once birth has occurred. The poet asks:

> Was Day prime error, that regret
> For darkness roars unstifled yet,
> That in this freedom, by faith won,
> Only acts of doubt are done,
> That unveiled eyes with tears are wet,
> They loathe to gaze upon the sum,

'Children of Darkness' voices a profound disillusionment accompanied by fear of life itself. The traditional associations of dark with evil and gloom and of light with good and innocence have been reversed, and one tends to agree with J.M. Cohen who says that the view of the poem is that it would have been better not to have been born.[64] The freedom inherited at birth causes neurotic uncertainty and sorrow in a loveless world, and the poet seems to long for loss of self in darkness where at least there is no pressure to obey any motive force higher than instinct. Although this poem marks a particularly low ebb in Graves's view of things, loss of value and loss of direction are recurrent ideas.

A case in point is 'The Lands of Whipperginny', where an apparently romantic situation is treated with deliberate harshness and cynicism.[65] The poem has an epigraph from Nashe's prose work, Jack Wilton, or The Unfortunate Traveller. In the context of Nashe's work, and of Graves's, 'Whipperginny' means purgatory. It is also worth noting that the first meaning given by the O.E.D. for 'Whipperginny' is a term of abuse for a woman. Purgatory is a secondary meaning, presumably derived from this and based on the idea of the misery caused by a nagging woman. Both senses are relevant to a poem which opens with an apparently romantic overture:

> Come closer yet, sweet honeysuckle, my coney, O my Jinny,
> With a low sun gilding the bottom of the wood.

The terms of endearment and the sincerity of the lines are compromised by the poet's uncertainty about the experience:

> Be this Heaven, be it Hell, or the Lands of Whipperginny,
> It lies in a fairy lustre, it savours most good.

The phrase 'fairy lustre' recalls the early romantic poems, but it also helps the poet to evade the necessity of defining his feelings by using these words in a dismissive gesture after the unresolved speculation of

64. Cohen, Robert Graves (1960), p.31.
65. W (1923), p.17.

the previous line. In addition, it is worth commenting on the use of the word 'savours'. Normally used in the context of tasting or sampling food, its appearance here suggests a rather dilettante or vicarious attitude on the part of the poet. The ambiguity of the poem becomes even more obvious in the second stanza where there is no attempt to decide upon the meaning of the psalms:

> Then stern proud psalms from the chapel on the moors
> Waver in the night wind, their firm rhythm broken,
> Lugubriously twisted to a howling of whores
> Or lent an airy glory too strange to be spoken.

The original version of the poem ended at this point, leaving everything unresolved. As Kirkham has said, it 'makes a virtue not only of not caring but of not knowing; it is deliberately inconclusive.'[66] When it was reprinted in the 1938 Collected Poems, a further stanza was added, which shows Graves coming down on the side of the romance he had previously seemed to belittle.[67] As it appears in Whipperginny, however, the poem is important chiefly for the writer's unease and refusal to be committed.

If bitterness and loss of faith in the positive qualities of love motivate 'Children of Darkness' and 'The Lands of Whipperginny', the outstanding poem in Mock Beggar Hall, 'Full Moon', continues this theme of the total failure of a relationship.[68] It has already been shown that one of the remarkable features of 'Full Moon' is the poet's uncompromising attitude of resignation and acceptance of defeat. There is no bitterness, but a heavy sense of failure, and this mood characterises a number of fine poems written in the period 1925-1927.

One example, first published in Welchman's Hose, is the four-line 'Diversion: Love without Hope' :[69]

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

We are struck at once by this vivid and quaint image which, in defiance of its brevity, sharply focuses a moment of impulse, and in so doing captures a complete experience. Furthermore, as in a poem like 'Essay on Knowledge', the abstraction of the title is in marked contrast to the visual impact of the poem itself. In this respect one is reminded also of

66. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves, p.65.
67. CP (1938), p.58.
68. See Chapter One, pp.80-3.
69. WH (1925), p.21.

an earlier work, 'Vain and Careless'. The common factor between these poems seems to be their use of emblem, and Donald Davie has provided a very lucid explanation of the nature of emblematic writing - at least insofar as it is a stylistic device used by Graves - and how it differs from symbolism. He writes that

> one can define the difference by saying that the symbol casts a shadow, where the emblem doesn't; the symbol aims to be suggestive, the emblem to be, even in its guise as riddle, ultimately explicit. Another difference might be that the emblem is made, fabricated, where the symbol is found; or rather, since it seems plain that both 'making' and 'finding' are involved in any act of imagination, let us say that the symbol aims to give the effect of having been discovered, where the emblem aims at the effect of having been constructed. This is an important distinction, for it means that part of the impressiveness of the good symbol lies in the place and the circumstances of its finding, whereas with the emblem this isn't true. [70]

One can see how clearly the features of emblematic writing as outlined above are true of poems like 'Love without Hope', or of 'Quayside', 'On Portents', and 'Like Snow', and are also what give them their particular strength. Indeed, the conclusion that suggests itself is that some of Graves's best writing has been done when he set himself to work within the disciplining confines of an emblematic style. Furthermore, it is evident that it is not a technique peculiar to the earlier stages in his development. Emblematic poems, in Davie's sense, have appeared at intervals through Graves's career.

The theme of 'Love without Hope' is approached from a different angle in 'The Presence'. [71] It deals with the poet's distress and sense of being accused by a woman for whom his love has died - no new theme in Graves's writing. This form of death is much worse than the physical loss of someone:

> ... for dead is gone indeed,
> Lost beyond recovery and need,
> Discarded, ended, rotted underground.

The force derived from this succession of verbs, each with its hard consonant sounds, recalls the technique used by Donne in, for example, 'Batter my heart, three person'd God'. [72] It enables us to grasp the

70. Donald Davie, Shenandoah, xiii, No.2 (Winter 1962), 40.
71. WH (1925), p.39.
72. John Donne, Complete Verse and Selected Prose (1929, ninth imp. 1962) p.285.

intensity of the poet's feelings as he struggles to cope with the accusation he senses. This fact is brought out with particular clarity in the 1938 revision. In 1925, Graves wrote that the woman's behaviour was 'in abuse/Of loving kindness', whereas the later version speaks of 'the profuse/Reproaches' implied by her behaviour.[73] These words, linked with the idea of her accusing look penetrating and being reflected from 'every stone and flower, table and book', inevitably bring to mind the earlier poem, 'Reproach', in which, as we saw, the poet also felt himself to be the victim of a disapproving look.

In another revision made at the same time, the poet's parenthetical comment on the state of his own emotions -

> ... (for our anguish too
> Denies we love her as we swear we do)

- is changed into a question in the first-person singular, thus giving the lines greater immediacy and indicating the uncertainty of the writer's feelings:

> ... (since this anguish of her grew
> Do I still love her as I swear I do?)

One can only speculate that Graves was seeking a degree of impersonality by his earlier use of the plural form, particularly as we know from his own account in Goodbye To All That that his marriage with Nancy Nicholson was becomingly increasingly strained. Douglas Day speaks of 'The Presence' as 'certainly the most moving poem in this period of his career', and especially in the last lines it resounds with sorrow and frustration at a situation from which the poet does not know how to escape:[74]

> ... How deaf or blind,
> When horror unrelieved maddens the mind
> With these same pangs that lately choked her breath
> And changed her substance, but have brought no death?

Graves finds himself subjected to a new kind of haunting, no less powerful than his old neurasthenia, and in 'The Presence' his dilemma is as unresolved as it was four years earlier in 'Down'.[75]

If failure in love was presented as a kind of death in 'Full Moon' and 'The Presence', the image is revived elsewhere to signify the moment of final, unrestricted confrontation in love. 'Pure Death' is a striking

73. CP (1938), p.57.
74. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.88.
75. PG (1921), pp.36-7 and Chapter Two, pp.156-58.

and unusual poem which opens by stating that the poet has dared to face the stark reality of death without any consolations:[76]

> 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.

The deliberate awkwardness and refusal to allow the lines to flow - for example, in the second line quoted - , the harsh tone, and the frequent use of monosyllables not only reflect the influence of Laura Riding, but testify to the determination of the poet to strip death down to a bald fact deprived of any euphemistic comforts. Thus far 'Pure Death' appears to have nothing to do with love, but in the second and third stanzas Graves goes on to show that he only achieved this total awareness of death by surrendering himself totally in love. The relationship between the poet and his lover had become a 'malady', a series of false exchanges of presents

> Till there was nothing but ungiveable pride
> That was not over-given...

They had reached a critical point at which their way forward depended exclusively upon them giving themselves to one another, and this act of self-abnegation is defined in the closing stanza. Again, the poet strains for exactitude of expression, distorting the usual word order to suggest the stress of the experience, yet, as his rhymes and carefully chosen vocabulary remind us, in perfect control:

> ... 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.

As Douglas Day has observed,

> that this surrender should reveal their terror of death, unabated by any philosophical or religious assurances, is a conclusion that makes the poem unique - the sort of thing that only Robert Graves would be likely to write.[77]

The bizarre idea, with its extraordinary fusion of wit and emotion, seems to descend straight from the world of Webster, Tourneur and Donne. The

76. P 1914-1926 (1927), pp.214-15.
77. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.97.

simultaneous awareness of love and death, with the knowledge of death coming through love, gives the poem a profundity of insight and emotion that are, perhaps, unusual in Graves's work. On this occasion, at least, there is neither irony nor evasion in his treatment of love.

A note of resignation to the fact of the unstable nature of love, linked with a determination to make the best of a relationship while it lasts, is sounded in 'Between Dark and Dark'.[78] Once more physical love is seen as something unpleasant - 'the pulse of tainted love' - but the poet also insists that it is a 'shivering glory not to be denied'. Thus we find that the fundamental ambiguity in Graves's attitude to physical love first noted in 'Oh, and Oh! ' survives as a central dilemma in his mature work. The strong sense of transience and uncertainty evoked in 'Essay on Knowledge' re-emerges here, and is associated with the increased absorption with time which is a notable feature of Graves's work from the late 1920's:

> Take your delight in momentariness,
> Walk between dark and dark, a shining space
> With the grave's narrowness, though not its peace.

Here love appears to offer a temporary comfort and joy in a basically unfriendly and bleak world. The poem was subsequently retitled 'Sick Love', and this draws attention more closely to the reference in the Song of Solomon ch. 2, v. 5 -

> Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples:
> for I am sick of love

- and makes more explicit the poet's exhortation to his beloved to be 'fed with apples' while she may.[79] Love, for all its limitations, is a positive and consoling emotion, and as such it is worth accepting.

We know that Graves did not always see love as merely comforting, and as his dedication to a woman became increasingly identified with his dedication to the muse, the beloved appears as the possessor of remarkable and transforming power. So, in 'The Age of Certainty', she is likened in turn to Andromeda, Atalanta, a she-Proteus, Niobe, and Helen.[80] In each case, she is described as bringing contentment while always remaining independent of him. This is a variation upon the idea behind the poem 'Against Kind', where the woman is elusive yet inescapable, unclassifiable yet omnipresent.[81] 'The Terraced Valley' is a particularly telling example of Graves's attitude to the power of his

78. P 1929 (1929), p.1.
79. CP (1938), p.71.
80. TPM (1930), p.6.
81. P 1929 (1929), pp.11-2.

beloved.[82] He begins by relating how

> In a deep thought of you and concentration
> I came by hazard to a strange region.

The 'strange region' corresponds to the world behind the looking-glass described in 'Alice', where everything exists in a reversed relationship. It is a fantasy world reached through the poet's thoughts about his love:

> 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.

As the poet thinks about love, it seems capable of reconciling - 'Hermaphrodising' - opposites, of transcending what is normally accepted as impossible. In The Long Weekend, Graves has provided us with a useful commentary on the idea used here: Speaking of the late 'twenties, he writes:

> the word 'relativity' now came to be commonly used, out of the context of Einstein's theory, to mean that a thing was only so if you cared to assume the hypothesis that made it so. Truth likewise was not absolute: 'beautiful results' could be obtained by mathematicians from consistent systems based on the hypothesis, for example, that one could slide a left hand into a rigid right-hand glove - or simultaneously into a pair of rigid right-hand gloves. What an amusing conquest of man's this was! He had freed himself for ever from the slavish and constraining supposition that two and two necessarily made four.[83]

It is into a world of 'beautiful results' that the poet strays as he thinks of his beloved, but the irony is that true love is not merely an intellectual abstraction, and therefore he finds himself alienated from her:

82. TPM (1930), pp.11-2.
83. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, The Long Weekend (1940, this ed.1971),p.93.

But you, my love, where had you then your station?
Seeing that on this common earth together
We go not distant from each other
I knew you near me in that strange region,
So search for you, in hope to see you stand
On some near olive-terrace, in the heat,
The left-hand glove drawn on your right hand,
The empty snake's egg perfect at your feet.

She is not to be seen, however, for she cannot accompany him into this 'phantasma', and ultimately the tone of the poem is self-critical. The poet reveals his own misunderstanding of love. The landscape described in 'The Terraced Valley' is finally as devoid of human associations as that in 'Rocky Acres', though the poet's reactions to his isolation are different. The conclusion to the poem is its most controversial point, and has been taken as indicative of Graves's limitations as a poet. He tells us that, having failed to locate his beloved in the 'strange region', he

... 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.

The change of mood and restoration of order here are so rapid that Charles Tomlinson and Michael Kirkham have judged it an oversimplified ending, even allowing for the power attributed to the woman.[84] J.M. Cohen raised an interesting point when he compared Graves's discovery of the 'strange region' with T.S. Eliot's moment of escape from time in the rose-garden at Burnt Norton. He continues:

> But it was in Graves's nature to reject such experience. Though his argument is so often cast in a metaphysical form, his attitudes have been consistently anti-metaphysical. Perhaps his early conditioning to psychoanalysis is the factor that has most consistently caused him either to accept the illogical and the paradoxical with a shrug, or to reduce them to plain terms.[85]

This is a valuable speculation, and it helps to define why Graves cannot ultimately be numbered among the great poets of human experience. The ironic structure of 'The Terraced Valley' is typically Gravesian, but it is also a defensive pose. Having asserted the existence of the 'strange region', and, as it is called in the 1938 revision, this 'trick of time',

84. ed. Boris Ford, The Pelican Guide to English Literature, Vol.7. (1961, rptd. 1966), p.465, and Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969)

the poet wants to get away from it again as soon as possible; and he does so by a witty sleight of hand that is not altogether satisfying.[86] Whereas in 'Pure Death' Graves faced the unknown, here he veers away from it, and the reader is left with a feeling of frustrated expectation.

In other poems of the 'thirties he approached various aspects of love in a less ambitious way, and achieved considerable success with them. For example, it is lust rather than love which forms the theme of 'Ulysses', 'Down, Wanton, Down ! ', and 'The Succubus'. In the first of these, 'much-tossed Ulysses', like the poet, is seen as the slave of women, at once insatiably attracted to them and yet obsessed with the filthiness of lust.[87] The effect of this is to generate confusion in his mind between the love he feels for his wife and the lust he has for women in general:

> Penelope and Circe seemed as one:
> She like a whore made his lewd fancies run
> And wifely she a hero to him bore.

Ulysses is the victim of his feelings, and can assert no control over them:

> All lands to him were Ithaca: love-tossed
> He loathed the fraud, yet would not bed alone.

It is a neurotic and intense poem, but the theme is familiar. Similarly, in 'The Succubus', where the poet addresses his own body, he considers why the almost Shavian 'devil-woman' summoned up by 'despair/In ecstasy of nightmare' to take advantage of man's sensual nature for her own ends, never comes

> ... as longed-for beauty
> Slender and cool, with limbs lovely to see,

but

> ... with hot face,
> With paunched and uddered carcase,
> Sudden and greedily does she embrace,
> Gulping away your soul, she has so close,
> Fathering you with brats of her own race.[88]

The concluding question is again self-critical and moral, for the poet asks his body whether the succubus is 'truly more gross than your lust is gross?' In this case, the ironic note gives the poem strength and assures us of the discipline Graves is imposing on his feelings. The last line of 'The Succubus' was altered in the 1938 Collected Poems to read:

86. CP (1938), pp.174-75.
87. P 1930-1933 (1933), pp.3-4.
88. Ibid., p.7.

Yet is the fancy grosser than your lusts were gross?

The rewording provides an excellent link with a new piece, 'The Stranger', which is the next poem in the volume.[89]

On this occasion the poet really does see the beautiful woman he lusted for in 'The Succubus'. At first he espies her from afar with a 'cynic eye':

He guessed mere grace of body
Which would not for unloveliness
Of cheek or mouth or other feature
Retribution pay.

Ironically, as she approaches he sees that she possesses 'unarguable... loveliness', and he is cast into confusion which rapidly increases:

To find her foolish-hearted
Would rid his baffled thought of her;
But there was wisdom in that brow
Of who might be a Muse.
Then all abashed he dropped his head:
For in his summer haughtiness
He had cried lust at her for whom
Through many deaths he had kept vigil,
Wakeful for her voice.

At the critical moment when the muse woman appears the poet is misled by his own feelings. Once again the woman is presented as beautiful, independent and dominant; the man as weak, foolish and subservient. Lust, which in these poems Graves implies is man's primary driving force, is mocked in his address to the phallus in 'Down, Wanton, Down ! '[90]

... but Love at least
Knows what is man and what mere beast.

There are certain codes and refinements of feeling associated with Love, as is hinted in the reference to lovers as squires. The courtly lovers of medieval romances were often called squires, and the 'delicacy' of their dedication and service is in sharp contrast to the 'witless' lust of the

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 poet rejects the idea that 'many-gifted Beauty' will succumb to this

89. CP (1938), p.87.
90. P 1930-1933 (1933), p.5.

domination by the phallus, or 'bald rule of thumb', as he calls it, thus insisting that love is discriminating in a way unknown to lust. Again, therefore, it is the woman who is dominant in relationships, for she can reject the force that motivates the man. As Kirkham puts it:

> The ideal set against the dominative, undiscriminative, mindless function of the animal part of man is, even more than love, woman - 'many gifted' (more richly endowed and with more to give than man) and 'wayward'. Her whims, rather than his physical compulsions, are the laws that now rule their relationship. [91]

As has been seen already, during the 'thirties the poet became increasingly willing to accept this version of male-female relationships, and to submit himself to the muse woman. At the same time his poems about love and about poetry itself moved together. At best, love seemed less neurotic and more a source of pleasure than ever before:

> True sky was never seen until to-day:
> For tinged before with the gross fears of clay
> All skies were, or their mildness burned away
> By the sun's lubber flames. [92]

But this delight was never permanent as 'A Jealous Man' clearly shows.[93] Here the man's emotion is sexual, obsessive, primitive, and exclusively male. The description of his fantasies recalls the language of earlier neurasthenic poems, particularly works such as 'Outlaws' and 'Ghost Raddled'. He imagines

> Tall corpses, braced together,
> Fallen in clammy furrows,
> Male and female,
>
> Or, among haulms of nettle
> Humped, in noisome heaps,
> Male and female.

He is a 'doomed devil', ravaged by images of bestiality and lust, whose anguish is the adult equivalent to the adolescent disgust expressed in 'Oh, and Oh! '. The conclusion insists once more on the superiority of the woman, for we are told:

> Now, out of careless sleep,
> She wakes and greets him coldly,
> The woman at home,
>
> She, with a private wonder
> At shoes bemired and bloody -
> His war was not hers.

91. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.140.
92. CP (1938), p.98.

Whether the woman's sleep was 'careless' in the sense of being carefree, or whether the word suggests her indifference to the man's plight, the reader is impressed by her calm, self-contained dignity as opposed to his mental anguish for which there appears to be no justifiable reason. We realise that the man's jealousy is associated with lust and has nothing to do with love. As such, it seems to reflect a moral failing on his part for which the woman is in no way responsible. This conclusion, showing the man's folly and weakness and the woman's strength and moral authority, is a typical illustration of an idea dealt with by Graves again and again. Basically his thesis is that the muse woman is always justified, however cruel or whimsical her behaviour. Male behaviour is rarely justifiable, and the favour of the muse woman is a gratuitous gift rather than a right that is earned. As he wrote later in 'The Visitation': [94]

> I quake for wonder at your choice of me:
> Why, why and why?

It is, perhaps, a limitation to Graves's poetry that while much of it leads up to a tribute to the muse woman, it almost always ends on a note of breathless awe and amazement. Seldom, if ever, does he seem able to delineate any further the mysterious power of the muse. It is inconceivable that he could have written as W.B. Yeats did to Dorothy Wellesley:

> My dear, my dear - when you crossed the room with that boyish movement, it was no man who looked at you, it was the woman in me. It seems that I can make a woman express herself as never before. I have looked out of her eyes. I have shared her desire. [95]

As far as Graves is concerned, woman, the goddess, remains incomprehensible and inexplicable.

The final stanza of 'Green Loving' is representative of what we can see with hindsight was probably the most important turn in Graves's attitude to love, for it leads on to the position elaborated in The White Goddess. Here, a novice in the service of love, he addresses himself:

> Lover, ungreen yourself, let her far glance
> Find yours at her own distance.
> Too close your eyes before,
> And held no more
> Than dreaming images of your own substance. [96]

94. CP (1975), p.204.
95. W.B. Yeats, Letters to Dorothy Wellesley (1940), p.118.
96. CP (1938), p.92.

The self-corrective tone and the insistence on the power of the muse woman alone to 'ungreen' him, are notes sounded throughout his later work. He shows himself so aware of man's flawed ability to love that when he celebrates the richness and wonder of a moment in a relationship, one senses that a major reason for the celebration is the miracle that such a moment can exist at all. Graves's closing words in the foreword to his Collected Poems (1965) endorse this feeling:

> My main theme was always the practical impossibility, transcended only by a belief in miracle, of absolute love continuing between man and woman. [97]

As his poetry up to 1938 makes clear, his evolution as a love poet was slow and painful, but the work published in the concluding section of the Collected Poems (1938) established the theme which since has occupied his attention almost exclusively.

97. CP (1965), Foreword, n.p.

Part Three: Fear and the Irrational.

A nightmarish fear of the irrational and an awareness of its presence close beneath the surface of everyday experience have been a basic part of Graves's consciousness almost from the outset of his work. No doubt this can be explained, at least in part, by the neurasthenia to which he fell victim during the First World War, and some of his poems clearly describe the personal torment caused by his illness. Others, however, even if they have their basis in a private crisis, succeed in generalizing its significance, showing the uncertainties that underlie all life and insisting upon the need to accept them.

A number of his earliest attempts to express his fears are very unimpressive, such as 'I Hate the Moon', one of the three 'Nursery Memories' published in Over The Brazier. [98] Here the moon is already associated with cruelty which appears to increase as it waxes to the full. The poem is presented from a child's point of view, and he claims to hate the moon because it can supposedly drive people mad. We are specifically invited to note that the piece was written 'after a moonlight patrol near the Brickstacks', which makes us realise that the poet's fear is not merely superstitious but also practical. The nature of the 'dreadful things' he anticipates the moon may do to him one day becomes obvious given this context. This is an expression of frank physical terror thinly disguised as childish imaginings.

One of the best poems in Fairies and Fusiliers deals much more skilfully with the poet's awareness of chaos in the world around him, and the falsity of any position of retreat. 'A Boy in Church' opens with the youth submerged in his own thoughts during a sermon, and his indifference to the proceedings is suggested in various ways. [99]. The first line - 'Gabble-gabble ...brethren...gabble-gabble ! ' - shows how, apart from an occasional word, the sermon is merely a background noise. Indeed, in line three, it is spoken of as a 'tuneful babble'. The fact that the boy does not know or care much whether

> The text is praise or exhortation,
> Prayer or thanksgiving, or damnation,

and the undiscriminating way he groups such varied themes together and dismisses them all, clearly underlines his lack of interest in the service. He is, however, fascinated by what he can see through the window, for outside a storm is brewing and the increasingly violent movement of the trees, which is seen but not heard, contrasts with the reassurance he derives from the continuing flow of the preacher's voice, and the security

98. OB (1916), p.26.
99. FF (1917), pp.68-9.

of the church building itself:

Outside it blows wetter and wetter,
The tossing trees never stay still..
The tortured copse bends to and fro
In silence like a shadow-show.
The parson's voice runs like a river
Over smooth rocks. I like this church:
The pews are staid, they never shiver,
They never bend or sway or lurch.
'Prayer', says the kind voice, 'is a chain
That draws down Grace from Heaven again.'

The 'tuneful babble' of the voice in the first stanza is now openly associated with a river. This simile, linking man and nature, complements the metaphor in the previous verse which spoke of the 'tortured copse', and suggests the unity of the natural world. The stability of the church building, and the physical shelter it offers from the bad weather are endorsed by the spiritual comforts of religion promised by 'the kind voice', which makes another passing impression on the boy's consciousness. His attention soon wanders again, and the fourth verse cleverly captures the movement of an inattentive, rather bored mind seeking distraction:

I add the hymns up, over and over,
Until there's not the least mistake.
Seven-seventy-one. (Look ! there's a plover!
It's gone !) Who's that Saint by the lake?

The last stanza adds depth of thought to the poem, for in it the boy renews the contrast between the security of the church and the scene outside, but this time the implication is that the congregation of 'ugly serious people linking/Sad prayers to a forging God', is deluded in its beliefs. The church, we are told, is 'pleasant...for dreams and thinking,/ Lolling and letting reason nod'. The boy has gazed out of the window and indulged in private day-dreams, but the congregation, whether they are aware of it or not, has also been participating in what is no more than an organised day-dream. The concluding line, again linking the worlds of nature and man, show the perspective in which church activity is finally placed:

... a dumb blast sets the trees swaying
With furious zeal like madmen praying.

The storm may not be heard inside the church, but it is real and unavoidable and something which the church cannot prevent. At best it offers a temporary

retreat. In the context of its time, the storm must also refer to the war situation and the poet's reaction to it. Douglas Day suggested that

> neither man's reason nor his faith, the poet seems to imply, will give him safety from the outside world of violence and irrationality. At the core of the poem, then, is perhaps an indication that Graves is here beginning to recognise the necessity of acknowledging the real world, with all its fury and unreason, instead of ignoring it in favour of a world of child-like fancy. [100]

'A Boy in Church' is particularly successful because it has greater subtlety of feeling than Graves usually achieved in his early writing. This is directly linked with the finely balanced structure of the poem, with its contrast between the church and the world outside, and the life-like way in which it reflects the movement of an inattentive mind. The one surprising and regrettable thing is that Graves has never included the poem in a collected edition of his work.

As his fear turned into personal haunting, Graves sought greater objectivity when he attempted to deal with it in verse. An example is 'After the Play', which, though undistinguished, has two points of interest. [101] In the first place, it adopts a ballad-form for a dialogue between a tyrannical and hostile father and his son. This is similar to other poems in Country Sentiment, such as 'A Frosty Night', 'The Cupboard', and 'Apples and Water', all of which are in ballad-form, though the language of 'After the Play' is more melodramatic than in the other dialogue poems. Indeed, the father's final denunciation of his son seems wholly disproportionate to the misdemeanour, which consisted merely of his lying momentarily about how he had spent his sixpence. However, the father's curse, given because the boy went to see a production of Hamlet, and now wants to be a tragic actor, is worthy of particular note:

> Horror that your Prince found, John may you find,
> Ever and again
> Dying before the house in such torture of mind
> As you need not feign.
>
> While they clap and stamp at your nightly fate,
> They shall never know
> The curse that drags at you, until Hell's gate.
> You have heard me. Go!

100. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), pp.17-8.
101. CS (1920), pp.18-20.

The curse is that the boy will be haunted, and this is the problem that the poet himself faced. It links with a further interesting detail. Hamlet is, amongst other things, a play about a character who is tormented by a ghost, and one finds in the boy's description of Hamlet's dilemma words which may very well be taken as representative of Graves's own predicament:

> All the furies of fate circled round the man,
> Maddening his heart,
> There was old murder done before play began,
> Ay, the ghost took part.

The poetry Graves wrote in the early 'twenties is haunted by the ghost of the war. Although it is seldom specifically mentioned (nine poems included in the final section of Country Sentiment, which is subtitled 'Retrospect', are the one notable exception to this), the nervous disorder resulting directly from the war dominated his work of the period. In 'After the Play' another of the boy's comments deserves notice. Having described the actions which he saw performed, he adds:

> How the plot turned about I watched in vain,
> Though for grief I cried.

Again we may take this as casting light upon one aspect of Graves's difficulties. The sense of being haunted was unequivocal and a description of the nightmares themselves was relatively easy, in the same way as the boy could recall the basic incidents in the play. But equally, as the boy could not follow the plot of Hamlet, the poet was unable to come to terms with his neurasthenia for a long time. We shall see how this crisis reveals itself in other poems.

'Dicky' is an account of a meeting between the title-character and a ghost who appears as an old man with face of clay and beard of cobwebs.[102] The circumstances surrounding this meeting are typical of those associated with many similar stories. Dicky tells how he was in a merry mood -

> I sang old roaring songs,
> Ran and leaped quick

- before the encounter which, not surprisingly, took place beside the churchyard. It is worth noting that when this poem was originally published in Poetry, 14 (Aug. 1919), 252-3, the first line quoted above read:

> I sang old heathen songs

which more than ever stresses Dicky's irreligious attitude. Since the experience he has been ailing, and it is the mother's response to Dicky's

102. Ibid., pp.14-5.

upset that demands attention. She says:

Do not sigh or fear, Dicky,
How is it right
To grudge the dead their ghostly dark
And wan moonlight?

We have the glorious sun,
Lamp and fireside.
Grudge not the dead their moonshine
When abroad they ride.

There are several points to be made here, the first being that yet again moonlight is associated with a sinister and distressing event. More important, however, is the nature of the mother's reply. It contains no advice, and as far as offering any support or comfort is concerned, it strikes us only by its complacency. Dicky may have survived despite his ailing heart, but his mother's rationalization moves no way towards resolving his fear. It simply evades the issue, and as Michael Kirkham has suggested 'for Graves to envisage neuroses as nothing but an arbitrary, meaningless torment from which one can seek protection but which is basically incomprehensible is to deny a half of his experience'.[103] Another poem, 'Thunder at Night', tells effectively of the intense fear felt by two children awakened by thunder and lightning from 'uneasy dreams' based on events in their bed-time stories.[104] The poet concludes that

They cannot know, could not be told
How soon comes careless day.

Even an understanding of what was happening, which the children lacked, would not have diminished the reality of their fear. The poet failed to admit this truth in 'Dicky'. Here he recognises that mere rationalization provides no easy solution to emotional and nervous distress, but the insight emerges in a poem where the writer has little personal involvement. 'Outlaws' presents quite another case.[105]

The title refers to the 'Old gods, shrunk to shadows' who lurk in the wet woods,

Greedy of human stuff to snare
In webs of murk.

Since the 1938 Collected Poems the phrase 'shrunk to shadows' has read 'tamed to silence', thus placing a different emphasis upon the subjugation

103. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.43.
104. CS (1920), p.54.
105. Ibid., pp.40-1.

of the ancient gods.[106] 'Shrunk to shadows' implies that the gods have wasted away, and presents an image of virtual impotence. 'Tamed to silence', on the other hand, hints that their power is not necessarily dead, even if their thunder is quietened. It is easier as a result to reconcile this phrase with the poet's respect for them as former 'Proud gods'. Humans are highly vulnerable to these ghosts, and are urged to 'look up', or else risk losing sight of the stars, and the distant guidelines they offer. The fact that the creeds and faith with which the outlawed gods were associated are dead makes no difference:

> These ancient gods of fright and lust
> Cling to life yet.

It is notable that they have been 'Banished to woods and a sickly moon', for once more the lunar influence is negative and hostile. This is contrasted with the heyday of their power when they 'spoke with thunder once at noon/To prostrate Kings'. The poem concludes with a definitive statement of the reversed position of the gods showing on the one hand their former pride, and on the other hand the degradation of their continuing existence:

> Proud gods, humbled, sunk so low,
> Living with ghosts and ghouls,
> And ghosts of ghosts and last year's snow
> And dead toadstools.

The verse illustrates how Graves has used a four-line stanza with a shortened fourth line, similar to that employed by Keats in 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. Clearly this has enabled him to evoke an atmosphere of gloom and mystery as the expectation raised by the rhythm in the rest of the stanza is perpetually disappointed. Unlike 'Dicky', here the poet attempts to explain the origin of the ghosts that haunt his mind. They are portrayed as a kind of legacy from times long past which is stored in the subconscious mind and emerges at night. The outlaws are fallen idols, and it is not obvious what attitude Graves himself holds towards them. Certain aspects of them repel him: for example, their association with fright and lust and with an 'unclean muse'. Against this, one can argue that as 'Proud gods', formerly worshipped by kings, and bearers of thunder, they arouse in the poet a degree of respect and awe. In the last analysis, the reader is left feeling that Graves's own response is ambivalent. There is no reference, even by implication, to the war as the root cause of the poet's bad dreams. Here the haunted person is presented as the victim of experience in which he has had no direct part. His dreams, like their subject matter

106. CP (1938), pp.8-9.

are gratuitous and beyond his control. Thus it may be said that in 'Outlaws' Graves did not tap the source of his neurasthenia, or find any way to resolve it. Rather, he paralleled it by using the psychological theory which upholds the influence of man's collective unconscious memory of the past upon his present life.

The title of the poem deserves note, for although it is essentially the gods who are the outlaws, there is a suspicion throughout that the dreamer also, because of his dreams, is in some degree an outlaw. It has been shown that this feeling was of growing importance for Graves during the nineteen-twenties, and it was confirmed by his association with Laura Riding and his eventual departure for Majorca.

'Outlaws' has been preserved in all the collected editions to date, and some of the revisions it has undergone show how Graves has shifted the sense of the poem to bring it into closer harmony with ideas that were developed subsequently in The White Goddess. In Robert Graves: poems selected by himself the reference to 'an unclean muse' is changed to 'a drumming muse', thus eliminating the original implication of disgust from the phrase.[107] Furthermore, the line in the eighth stanza referring to 'peasant, tyrant, priest' was altered at the same time to 'warrior, virgin, priest', and if one accepts the virgin as being representative of the priestess devoted to the White Goddess, the significance of the change is obvious. The warrior, the virgin and the priest stand for the three sources of power and influence in ancient society. Michael Kirkham is surely right when he says that

> what is interesting is that Graves should see a connection between the 'old gods' of this poem and the White Goddess of the later poetry; it allows one to infer that there is also a connection between his early neurasthenia and the experiences symbolized in the mythology of the White Goddess.[108]

This point is further evidence for the argument presented in detail in the previous chapter.

The reality of his neurasthenic haunting was, perhaps, the most certain thing in Graves's life during the early 'twenties, and two poems in The Pier-Glass collection record his sensations and convey a strong sense of his dread of a lapse into madness and of being overwhelmed by resurgent memories from his subconscious. His utter helplessness is

107. PSH (1957), pp.20-1.
108. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.44.

suggested in 'Incubus' when he is seen asleep with 'Arms in supplication spread' while a threatening Moon, 'Cloaked in shadow', stoops to mutter sinister words in his ear.[109] Body and soul, or that part of the subconscious which is here depicted as an incubus, are divided against one another, and the coming of the nightmare is portrayed as a travesty of a sexual relationship:

> 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.

The encounter is enforced, the Body having no choice in the matter, and we see how the poet's occasional distaste for the physical has become an aspect of the nightmares that threaten to disintegrate his personality, and that are described later in the poem as 'half Death'. 'Incubus' concludes unsatisfactorily in that the relief which is celebrated when the Body awakens to see 'the sun-commanded sky', and to sing

> 'O morning scent and treetop song,
> Slow-rising smoke and nothing wrong! '

is, at best, temporary. This is not a resolution of the kind advocated in On English Poetry, for the poet has failed to touch the root of his problem. Indeed, he achieves little more than an evocation of a particular kind of horror and of the relief felt when it passes. Because the relief comes so easily, and the cause of the problem has not been diagnosed, 'Incubus' is less successful in impressing upon us the degree of horror which the poet has experienced than 'Down'.[110]

This poem opens with references to a clock striking two and a cock crowing three hours before dawn, an ominous and unexplained event, which is followed by the sound of shutters clicking and knocking. The disturbed sleeper 'remembers a sad superstition/Unfitting for the sick-bed', and as a means of ridding himself of this recollection he turns to

> ... the simple tales
> That puzzled childhood; riddles, turn them over,
> Half-riddles, answerless, the more intense: -
> Lost bars of music tinkling with no sense
> Recur, drowning uneasy superstition.

109. PG (1921), p.44.
110. Ibid., pp.36-7.

For the moment, he is able to suppress the thoughts that threaten to distress him. However, the second stanza returns to the idea of the man's sickness, and indeed his deteriorating state, asking 'how had he come/To sink?' The effects of the interruption to his sleep are effectively described and reveal how he is a victim of supralogical pressures. 'Since clock and cock', he has sunk down

> Through mattress, bed, floor, floors beneath, stairs,
> cellars,
> Through deep foundations of the manse, still sinking
> Through unturned earth,

apparently having succeeded in cheating space

> With inadvertent motion or word uttered
> Of too-close-packed intelligence,

until he became

> ... like a stage-ghost,
> Funereally with weeping, down, drowned, lost!

The long lines, and, in places, the amount of punctuation link with the abundance of strong consonants to create a feeling of remorseless pressure. The victim's ignorance of what he has said or done to induce the crisis makes him as vulnerable as he is, yet he accepts that he is in some unknown way the guilty party. The torment arises from within himself.

As so often in Graves's early poetry, he turns to happy memories of childhood, and longs for the sunny days when he could drop a stone between the flat slabs that masked an ancient castle well, 'Plunging his mind down with it'. He was then able to allow his imagination to follow the stone fearlessly into the depths, lying 'without spirit; until that floated back/From the deep waters'. Now he cannot experience 'The bliss of repossession' as his thoughts return from the dark regions of his mind, or enjoy the 'kindly sun' and 'the scent of thyme'. Childhood has been left behind and its memories can no longer comfort him in a way that is relevant to his present distress. Although the causes for this feeling are different, one is reminded of the sense of alteration and loss voiced by Wordsworth in his 'Immortality Ode'. Graves can look back and recall with envious longing his untroubled childhood, but the totality of his separation from it is shown in the ending which varies greatly from that found by Wordsworth:

> Falling, falling ! Light closed up behind him,
> Now stunned by the violent subterrene flow
> Of rivers, whirling down to hiss below
> On the flame-axis of this terrible world;
> Toppling upon their water-fall, O spirit...

Graves is in hell - indeed the 'flame-axis' recalls Lear's 'wheel of fire' (4. VII.47) and the phrase may owe something to it. Both the reference to light closing behind him and the use of the word 'subterrene' remind us of his earlier poem, 'Escape', where he described how he had cheated death after his serious injury. That poem concluded with exclamations of delight and relief, '0 Life! 0 Sun! ', but 'Down' dies out on a note of pleading and despair. In A Journal of Curiosities, which is included in But It Still Goes On, Graves wrote: 'One of the best physical sensations I know is waking up dead-tired, after a night of horror'. [111] Having read 'Down', in which the poet failed to achieve this relief, and having seen the anguish expressed in it, one can understand the statement more easily than by simply reading 'Incubus', where a description of his awakening was included. Not the least part of the horror of 'Down' is that it continues.

Guilt - so often an aspect of the poet's distress - receives particularly interesting treatment in 'Return', where his divided feelings are dramatised.[112] Here he writes from the point of view of restored health and strength, having reached the end of 'The seven years' curse'...

> That drove me from this kind land,
> From mulberry-bough and apple-bough
> And gummy twigs the west-wind shakes,
> To drink the brine from crusted lakes
> And grit my teeth on sand.

The 'kind land' is associated with the rural delights frequently celebrated in the early poems, and the sterility and unfriendliness of the landscape of exile contrast sharply with these. In 'Return' the details of the countryside are employed to suggest two opposing kinds of consciousness, thus extending the scope of a device already used successfully in 'Rocky Acres'. In the following stanzas the newly restored personality (the 'I' of the poem) wishes revenge upon the offending qualities (the 'you' of the poem). The speaker says he has been 'scapegoat for your pride', and also attacks

> ...your cold, malicious brain
> And most uncharitable, cold heart.

The reference to the damaging effects of pride takes up an idea used in 'The Gnat', and voiced a year earlier in Country Sentiment. [113] We were told in 'The Gnat' that pride 'outlawed' the heart of Watkin. Moreover, in 'One Hard Look ! , a cold heart and a calculating mind were blamed for destroying the look 'That lovers love to see' . [114]

The fourth stanza provides a contrasting description of the landscape to which the exile has returned, and here the dominant tone is cheerful,

111. Graves, But It Still Goes On (1930), p.146.
112. PG (1921), pp.42-3.
113. CS (1920), 'Vain and Careless',

optimistic, and, as Michael Kirkham has observed, indicates a new awareness of the need for self-disciplined effort if the release is to be lasting: [115]

> Here Robin on a tussock sits,
> And Cuckoo with his call of hope
> Cuckoos awhile, then off he flits,
> While peals of dingle-dongle keep
> Troop discipline among the sheep
> That graze across the slope.

The robin is associated with the New Year, and the cuckoo heralds the summer, so the poet's choice of birds is significant. The fact that the cuckoo's song is heard intermittently endorses the idea that although hope is there, it is not a matter for complacent acceptance. The phrase 'peals of dingle-dongle' might call to mind an idealised nursery-world where the sheep inevitably come home 'wagging their tails behind them', but the purpose of the bells, pleasant as they may sound, is interpreted as disciplinary. The fact that 'Troop discipline' is mentioned makes it clear that there is nothing arbitrary or casual about it. Even the brook mentioned in the next stanza 'Through the glade his water heaves', which suggests a much less lackadaisical atmosphere than the 'minnow-peopled country brooks' longed for in 'Morning Phoenix'.

The really important advance in 'Return' comes in the last verse. It was shown how, in the opening part of the poem, the writer wished for simple vengeance to fall on his alter-ego. He now rejects this in favour of a 'wider peace' characterised by a willingness to forgive and accept past injuries without retaliation:

> Yet, no, I ask a wider peace
> Than peace your heart could comprehend,
> More ample than my own release;
> Go be you loosed from your right fate,
> Go with forgiveness and no hate;
> Here let the story end.

This conclusion, reached through self-debate as can be seen by the tone and movement of the first line, is more satisfactory than the ending to 'The Pier-Glass', which seemed forced and shallow. Yet Graves was not finally pleased with it, and in the Collected Poems (1938) the stanza was totally revised. [116] Since then it has read:

115. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves, (1969), p.52.
116. CP (1938), pp.61-2.

But no, I ask a surer peace
Than vengeance on you could provide.
O fear no ill from my release:
Be off, elude the curse, disgrace
Some other green and happy place -
This world of fools is wide.

If the peace is 'surer' rather than 'wider', it may hint that Graves came to think that a wider peace was impossible, but that dismissal of the hostile alter-ego led to greater personal security than he could gain by vengeance. Dismissal does seem to be the keynote here, and the tone is more curt than in the original where one felt that the poet was exercising tolerance and forgiveness. It is as though by the time he revised the poem Graves felt enough strength and control to avoid the need to grant forgiveness. Furthermore, he obviously does not accept the idea that the story will simply end, but anticipates its recurrence elsewhere; and indeed he has shown the irruptive nature of fate or misfortune in many subsequent poems. Perhaps the reference to 'This world of fools' indicates a residue of self-scorn for his own former weakness.

'Return' is interesting both for the dramatic technique it uses to project the conflicting feelings in the poet's mind, and also for the way in which it concludes. Kirkham has said that

> as a symbol for the divided self the ego and alter-ego idea was an important discovery for Graves; it was extended and discussed considerably in the next three years, and after a period of disuse was revived during the 'forties and has been ever since an integral part of the White Goddess mythology. [117]

It is perhaps worth mentioning one further work dealing specifically with the poet's neurasthenia, if only to show that the reconciliation achieved in 'Return' was by no means permanent. 'The Rock Below' was published in Whipperginny, but shares the mood of a number of pieces in The Pier-Glass, and recalls in particular 'The Stake', although for reasons which will be shown it is inferior to that work. [118] It presents the poet's investigation and purgation of his mind in terms of clearing and replanting a garden. He tears up the speedwell and daisies 'Root and all', and wrenches out the thorns in order 'To set a rose-bush in that place'. The weeds and thorns represent the superficial and obvious symptoms of the poet's unhappiness, while the planting of the rose stands for his hope of love and peace:

117. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves, (1969), p.53.
118. W (1923), pp.40-1.

Yet the bush cries out in grief:
'Our lowest rootlets turn to rock,
We live in terror of the drought
Withering crown and stock.'

The rose is unable to flourish permanently because it encounters resistance from beneath, and in the same way the poet's relief is short-lived because the fundamental cause of his illness has not been removed. His reaction is to destroy such happiness as he has, and dig down until he strikes the stone, 'Jarring hatefully'. After questioning his ability to cope with this obstacle, the poem concludes with a statement of defiant determination, and a claim that recovery has taken place:

Heave shall break my proud back never,
Strain shall never burst my heart:
Steely fingers hook in the crack,
Up the rock shall start.

Now from deep and frightful pit
Shoots forth the spiring phoenix-tree
Long despaired in this bleak land,
Holds the air with boughs, with bland
Fragrance welcome to the bee,
With fruits of immortality.

The unsatisfactory thing here is that the restoration of the waste-land has no credibility other than as a wish-fulfilment. It is a forced and false conclusion which fails to convey a sense of reality because it has been imposed rather than reached. This point is underlined if one looks at 'The Stake', where Graves wrote a poem that grows out of itself as naturally as the tree it describes:[119]

Spring calls, and the stake answers
Throwing out shoots;
The towns debate what life is this
Sprung from such roots.

Naseboro' says 'A Upas Tree';
'A Rose', says Crowther;
But April's here to declare it
Neither one nor other.

119. PG (1921), p.11.

Neither ill nor very fair,
Rose nor Upas,
But an honest oak-tree,
As its parent was.

A green-tufted oak-tree
On the green wold,
Careless as the dead heart
That the roots enfold.

The very rhythms and diction of 'The Stake' establish it as a more eloquent and integrated poem than 'The Rock Below'. It is rare for Graves to write lines as unnaturally phrased as 'Heave shall break my proud back never', and one assumes that the deliberate awkwardness is intended to convey the difficulty involved in tearing up the rock, but it is a cumbersome tactic. Similarly the phrase 'spiring phoenix-tree' - even if 'spiring' is a pun combining 'church-spire' and 'respire' - and the closeness of the words 'bleak', 'bough' and 'bland' do not show the sensitivity to language which one associates with this poet. The references to a 'bleak land' recall 'Rocky Acres' and 'Return', and the bees as a symbol of hope have been seen in 'The Pier-Glass' (though there their use is ambiguous) and 'A False Report', where they were introduced with greater effect. In fact, 'The Rock Below' contains echoes of a variety of poems on a similar theme, any of which were more successful.

Prolonged subjection to neurasthenic distress appears to have deepened Graves's belief in the reality of experience which underlies the everyday world and which cannot be accounted for by ordinary rational explanations. As he sought philosophical detachment in his poetry of the mid-'twenties this fact becomes evident and is frequently given ironic expression. It is particularly true of three poems in Mock Beggar Hall where Graves comments on the nature of God, and upon the impossibility of knowing Him. The structure of 'Knowledge of God' is witty for it proceeds by exposing the inadequacy and inaccuracy of attempts to make positive statements about the Deity.[120] Because our experience is bound by laws of time and space, our words do not suffice:

'Has been' and 'is' the seasons bind,
(Here glut of bread, there lack of bread).
The mill-stones grumble as they grind
That if God is, he must be blind,
Or if he was, is dead.

120. MBH (1924), p.58.

The style is dry and unadorned, the versification simple, but the poem has a stimulating tautness of thought. In terms of subject and presentation, it has many similarities to 'The Rainbow and the Sceptic'. [121] This poem begins with a man's protest against the endless instability he observes in the world and for which he blames God:

'For Fate's a word of Trivial sense
And Freedom is knocked blind,
If there is nowhere permanence,
If God can change His mind.'

The sight of a rainbow increases his scepticism, for in its transience and elusiveness he sees an image of the temporary nature of laws and of the insufficiency of wisdom 'to unlock/The essential heart of things'. At this point he is addressed by 'A Spirit of air' and urged to have hope and faith, though not to expect any ultimate revelation of truth:

'Knowledge of changing lock and key,
So much the FINITE is;
Let the bow beckon "Follow me,
Whose hopes are certainties;"

'Yet beyond all this rest content
In dumbness to revere
INFINITE God without event,
Causeless, not there, not here.'

This conclusion is virtually a restatement of the attack on the 'cribbed empiricist' whose faith in 'Time and Space and Gravity' makes him incredulous of accounts of witches putting to sea in sieves or flying on broomsticks. [122] As the poet says:

... Space and Time have only sense
Where these are flattered and adored;
And there sit many parliaments
Where clock and compass have no word.

The thesis is given a more sinister illustration in 'Attercop: the All-wise Spider', where a dispute between James, philosopher and rationalist, and Walter, poet and romantic, is presented, only to be satirized when both men are seen by the poet as victims of the spider. [123] Douglas Day suggests that James may stand for William James, and Walter for Sir Walter Raleigh, the Oxford scholar, [124] but Kirkham's idea that the two disputants represent Graves's 'two previous poetic selves' is more

121. Ibid., pp.77-9.
122. Ibid., pp.23-4.
123. Ibid., pp.14-5.
124. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.67.

plausible.[125] James argues that the web in which he is inextricably caught up is Life and Liberty, whereas Walter relies upon 'his natural-magic charm' as a means of sweeping aside the restricting 'threads of gossamer'. A grotesque comedy derives from the picture drawn by the poet showing James so blinded by his observations of 'intricate silk entangling both his feet', and Walter so foolishly indifferent to his predicament, that neither hears the 'ancestral cries' dedicating them

> .. 'To our All-Wise, Omnivorous
> Attercop, glowering over us,
> Whose table we have set
> With blood and bones and sweat.'

The spider is a symbol of malice and of the random cruelty, or 'caprice' as it is called in 'Interchange of Selves', which affects men's lives. Attercop belongs to the realms of shade occupied by the malign gods in 'Outlaws', as the reference to 'ancestral cries' indicates, and his destructive nature makes him a descendent of the buzzard in 'Rocky Acres'. In addition to these links with earlier poems, Michael Kirkham has commented upon an important tie with later work. 'It may be said,' he writes, 'that either the tyrannical, bloodthirsty spider symbolizes, more crudely, the same aspect of love as is represented by the Goddess in her most malevolent aspect, or the White Goddess myth draws on other areas of Graves's experience than love for its imagery of apparently causeless suffering.'[126] These 'other areas' refer to the poet's neurasthenia and unhappiness in love which, as has already been suggested, seem to have played a formative part in the evolution of his particular myth.

The vividness of 'Attercop: the All-wise Spider' is also found in 'The North Window' where Graves succeeds in dramatizing his sense of God's complexity rather than simply stating it.[127] He imagines how, during a church service on All Souls' Eve, the damned rise from their tombs and, as it were, stage an alternative ritual outside. The implications of this are deeply ironic:

> They make them a furious chapel of wind and gloom,
> With, Southward, one stained window, The Hour of Doom,
> Lit up by the lamp of the righteous beaming through,
> With the scene reversed, and the legend backwards too,
> Displaying in scarlet and gold the Creator Who damns,
> Who has thrust on His Left the bleating sheep and the lambs,
> Who has fix't on His Right the goats and kids accursed,
> With Omega: Alpha restoring the last as first:
> Then the psalms to God that issue hence or thence
> Ring blasphemy each to the other's Omnipotence.

125. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.82.
126. Ibid., pp.82-3.

Truth, we see again, is relative, a matter of perspective. It is impossible to say with certainty who is damned and who is saved, and insofar as conventional religion endeavours to do this through worship of an ambiguous 'Creator Who damns', it is revealed as narrow-minded and complacent. One is reminded of 'A Boy in Church', where the poet had a similar sense of the church as an island of introverted dreaming which took no account of the mounting storm outside that made the trees sway 'With furious zeal like madmen praying'. What has changed is Graves's position in relation to the poem. In 'The North Window' he is no longer inside the church, yet he is not one of the damned souls. As in 'Attercop', where he was neither Walter nor James, he is the observer and commentator upon events which affirm the irony behind any attempt to simplify experience or impose value judgments on it. Yet although Graves is neither a worshipper nor a damned soul, neither Walter nor James, his viewpoint in both poems is strictly dependent upon his having previously known these attitudes at first hand. In this respect the poems are succinct appraisals of their author's intellectual and emotional development.

The exploration of the relative nature of truth and of the inadequacy of laws of time and space was given new urbanity and sophistication in 'Alice', the opening poem in Welchman's Hose.[128] Lewis Carroll's famous character is described as 'that prime heroine of our nation' because, 'being of true philosophic bent', she was able to travel beyond the looking-glass and back accepting the truth and reality of what she experienced in both places without judging either experience to be superior. The world discovered by Alice does not

> Make nohow or contrariwise the clean
> Dull round of mid-Victorian routine,

but

> Nor did Victoria's golden rule extend
> Beyond the glass.

This 'lubberland' may perhaps be characterised as the world of imagination, and as such it is specifically linked in the poem with the creative fantasies of Apuleius and Rabelais. The realm of unreason, which denies the absolute value of formal logic, is not to be confused with nonsense land. It is part of the poet's joke to make Alice's mastery of the other world appear pragmatic and logical. She sets about the task 'with proper British phlegm', or, as the 1938 version has it, 'with truly British pride.'[129]

128. WH (1925), pp.1-2.
129. CP (1938), pp.45-6.

Both phrases make this pioneering 'mastermind' sound thoroughly conventional and thus there arises what Kirkham calls the poem's 'central impudence'. [130] In addition to his unexpected approach to the well-known story of Alice, Graves makes skilful use of language and rhymes to create a style that is at once relaxed and conversational - rather in the manner of 'The Lord Chamberlain Tells of a Famous Meeting' - and suggestive of 'the relativism of the poem's thought...in the irregular beat of the lines'. [131] The following quotation shows how the rhymes are varied, masculine and feminine endings or stressed and unstressed syllables being matched on occasion:

> ...but her greater feat
> Was rounding these adventures off complete,
> Accepting them, when safe returned again,
> As queer but true, nor merely in the main
> True, but as true as anything you'd swear to,
> Not worse or better than the life we are heir to,
> The waking life which, but I can't say why,
> We worship as the sole Reality.

There is a parody of philosophical argument in the weighing up of various possibilities: 'Not merely in the main/True, but as true ...'; 'Not worse or better than...'. But this is apparently dismissed casually in the 'swear to'/'heir to' rhyme, and the conversational tone of 'but I can't say why', rhymed as it is with 'Reality', which, ironically for a word of such importance, has a feminine ending. The subtlety and flexibility of this technique outreaches that of most of the poems in Mock Beggar Hall. It is also interesting to note that fear, so often prominent in the poet's earlier awareness of the world 'beyond the glass', is no part of Alice's experience. Michael Kirkham uses this fact to argue that the world of unreason as presented here is one-sided and belies the poet's own knowledge. [132] No doubt there is some validity in his point of view but it is also possible to interpret this trait as indicative of Graves's continuing search for emotional detachment. It is, indeed, the poem's wit and humour that impress rather than its emotional power, as was the case in 'Full Moon'.

However, as we have seen, the publication of 'Essay on Knowledge' signifies an advance in Graves's treatment of the unpredictable and irrational for it unites his direct emotional response with his intellectual preoccupation. This success was eloquently followed by 'The Cool Web', where language was presented as our necessary, though not purely beneficial,

130. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.89
131. Cohen, Robert Graves (1960), p.41.
132. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.89.

defence against the full horror of reality, and also by 'Warning to Children'.[133] The warning - that life is ultimately mysterious and indefinable - is wittily reinforced by the cyclic structure of the poem. The children are told that

> All the many largeness,smallness,
> Fewness of this single only
> Endless world

cannot be reduced to a simple theory or system of ideas which may be opened like a parcel. The attempt to explain reality away leads one further and further from any answer, and merely provokes new questions. The children may think of

> Lumps of slate enclosing dappled
> Red and green, enclosing tawny
> Yellow nets, enclosing white
> And black acres of dominoes.
> In the acres a brown paper
> Parcel, then 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
> Lumps of slate enclosed by dappled
> Red and green,...

Thus when explored, the private island retreat from the world only raises new issues, and eventually returns us to the original unknowns. Graves concludes by telling the children that it is only when they think of the complexity and variety of life - which includes experience through the looking-glass - ratherthan trying to reduce it to restricted terms, that they 'untie the string'.

A similar idea is pursued in 'The Lost Acres', a fine poem first published in the 1914-1927 collection.[134] The title refers to 'acres' never shown on Ordnance-Survey maps, but whose existence, the poet maintains, is beyond dispute. The technical language and apparatus of measurement - 'intercalation of an inch', 'the tautest measuring chain', 'the so-many thousandth foot', and 'exact theodolite'- are unable to account fully for experience. The poet demonstrates his awareness of the impropriety of this jargon and of the way of thinking it implies when, in the last two stanzas, he celebrates the intangible but indubitable element of mystery in life:

133. P 1929 (1929), pp.5-6. 134. P 1914-1927 (1927), p.223.

Yet there's no scientific need
To plot these acres in the mind
With prehistoric fern and reed
And monsters such as heroes find.

They have, no doubt, their flowers, their birds,
Their trees behind the phantom fence,
But of the substance of mere words:
To walk there would be loss of sense.

Whereas 'The Cool Web' explored the part that language plays in our lives, 'Lost Acres' adds a fuller statement of what vanishes if we

...grow sea-green at last and coldly die
In brininess and volubility.

But there is a return to the idea of the inescapable horror of reality in 'Castle' which is strongly reminiscent of 'Down'.[135] In this poem, life means a purely physical existence, and the emphasis throughout is on the one stark fact that

...by definition
There's no way out, no way out.

Thus, the castle, an image of life, is like the poet's body in which he is trapped:

No escape,
No such thing; to dream of new dimensions,
Cheating checkmate by painting the King's cheek
So that he slides like a queen .
Or to cry nightmare, nightmare,
Like a corpse in the cholera-pit
Under a load of corpses.
Or to run the head against these blind walls,
Enter the dungeon, torment the eyes
With apparitions chained two and two,
And go frantic with fear,
And die and wake up sweating in moonlight
In the same courtyard, sleepless as before.

Here we can see how, even at a time when Graves was interpreting life with new philosophical detachment and wit, the old terror was still strong enough to break through and temporarily overwhelm him.

135. P 1929 (1929), p.15.

It recurs as the subject of 'Nobody', an 'ancient mischief', which
Harasses always with an absent body. [136]

The single word 'nobody' - used thirteen times in fourteen lines - suggests the obsessive nature of the irrational but self-produced fears, lusts and passions which drive people. Man's life, the poem implies, is a prolonged neurotic nightmare:

> Until this nobody shall consent to die
> Under his curse must every man lie -
>
> The curse of his jealousy, of his grief and fright,
> Of sudden rape and murder screamed in the night.

Eventually the elements of this vision of horror were absorbed into the White Goddess mythology, where they become part of the total mystery of the all-powerful deity.

It is interesting to conclude the examination of this theme by reference to one poem in which Graves seems to describe the gradual purgation of his worst phobias. The poem, titled 'Fiend, Dragon, Mermaid', recounts the various battles fought and won by the poet.[137] The Fiend, who was 'Hell's prince in his time', was a religious adversary, tempting the poet with false friendship and laming him before their struggle ended. The Dragon is defined as 'an emanation of my fears', and he tried to force the poet to admit his supremacy. As in 'Old Wives' Tales', the mermaid, rerpresentative of the poet's lust, is the final destructive force with which he contended. She is a siren whose offers of sensual pleasure and the peace of oblivion are rejected by the poet as 'no dream of mariners'. Thus far 'Fiend, Dragon, Mermaid' is not substantially different from 'Old Wives' Tales', published thirteen years earlier. The change comes in the last lines, where the poet tells of the new, self-humbling relationship with the muse woman in which he is now involved:

> I turned my gaze to the encounter of
> The later genius, who of my pride and fear
> And love,
> No monster made but me.

Thus we find the poet admitting that he is not simply a helpless victim - an old idea that has now lost favour; owing to his personal weakness he is responsible for his position. Once again, therefore, in the treatment of his fears and his sense of the insecurity of life, as with the other themes we have examined, we find that by 1938 Graves's work was taking directions which made them natural forerunners of the White Goddess mythology.

136. P 1930-1933 (1933), p.8. 137. CP (1938), pp.103-04.

highly romantic and the poet has painted a rather precious word picture with a curious mixture of precision and vagueness. This is to be understood, perhaps, as a consequence of the writer's vision having occurred 'Through the dreams of yester-night'. The poem seeks to establish a contrast between the wounded and dying knight and the innocent and gentle fauns:

> My blood brother great in fight
> I saw lying, slowly dying
> Where the weary woods were sighing
> With the rustle of the birches,
> With the quiver of the larches
> Woodland fauns with hairy haunches
> Grin in wonder through the branches
> Woodland fauns that know no fear.

There is an air of archaic remoteness and unreality, not only in some of the vocabulary (we have already had 'yester-night' and 'great in fight', and later we find 'knowing nought'), but also in the description itself. 'Hairy haunches' conjures up notions of roughness and wildness inconsistent with the mildness of the fauns, and, similarly, 'Grin with wonder' introduces an incongruously comic element. At the same time, the sound of 'rustle of the birches' and 'quiver of the larches' successfully evokes the movement of trees in a mild breeze. The next lines are less satisfactory as the sounds do not stand in as close relation to the sense, and the alliteration and assonance become obtrusive:

> Wondering, they wander near
> Munching mushrooms red as coral,
> Bunches, too, of rue and sorrel.

Rue and sorrel are both plants with a sour taste, and rue, also known as herb-grace, is representative of sorrow (cf. Hamlet 4.V.180) and grace (cf. The Winter's Tale 4.IV.76). These ideas are compatible with the pitying and mild nature of the fauns, who are bewildered by the dying knight's 'uncouth and bestial wounds'. The actual death is romanticised, and the departing 'life-blood' seems ornamental rather than fatal:

> But the crimson life-blood oozes
> And makes roses of the daises, [sic]
> Purple carpets of the mosses.[140]

The fauns are deceived by the knight's passing, for it is quiet and as easy as other natural processes - a bee departing from a lily, or a holly-berry falling. Mysterious and unexplained as he is, the knight is

140. Please see * in Additional Notes, p. 235.

never clearly distinguished from the surroundings in which he is presented, and his decease is simply a final fading out. The result is that the reader neither accepts the idea of life and death as a single process, nor has a sense of pity or grief as no real sense of loss is conveyed. The fauns appear to have an intuitive awareness of the knight's honour and dignity for they weave 'crowns to deck him', but although we are told that 'He was worthy of the Bay', our impressions of 'The Dying Knight and the Fauns' are insipid and hazy, apart perhaps from the trees which stand out as the most real feature in the poem.

Graves quotes from this work in his Foreword to the Collected Poems (1938), where he observes: [141]

> I was preoccupied with the physical side of poetry - the harmonious variation of vowels and the proper balance, in a line or stanza, between syllables difficult and easy to articulate. For the most part I wrote in a romantic vein, of wizards, monsters, ghosts and outlandish events and scenes. One typical poem began:
>
> Hateful are studied harmonies
> Where screams the parrot as he flies,
> Craning his painted neck...
>
> Another ended:
>
> Green terror ripples through our bones,
> We yearn for careless day.

These comments are important for two reasons. Firstly, they show the young writer's interest in his craft and his concern to master technique - an idea that is also central in 'The Poet in the Nursery'. [142] Secondly, the adolescent wizards, fauns and monsters are harmless forerunners of the more threatening mermaids, dragons and fiends of the later poetry. They are, as it were, images of innocence where their successors are images of experience. Furthermore, it was noted that 'The Dying Knight and the Fauns' was presented as a dream, and similar moods, followed eventually by nightmares, influenced many of Graves's early poems. There is, for example, the fanciful piece about the 'little stormsprite/Whose name is Willaree'. [143] Here the poet envies the isolation and barren surroundings in which Willaree lives:

141. CP (1938), pp.xv-xvi.
142. See Chapter One, pp.23-6.
143. OB (1916), p.8.

His home is on the mountain-top
Where I love to be,
Amid grey rocks and brambles
And the red rowan tree.

The light-hearted tone of these lines, and even the description of the stormy weather in the last verse lack the sinister and cruel implications of the landscape in 'Rocky Acres', or even the warning we sense in the tortured bending of the trees before the wind in 'A Boy in Church'. In 'Willaree' the world is devoid of malice. A similar atmosphere of security and optimism is found in 'Jolly Yellow Moon', [144] cited by Douglas Day as 'perhaps the most typical example of Graves's style at this time'. [145] The second stanza demonstrates the various elements in the poem:

Come comrades, roam we round the mead
Where couch the sleeping kine;
The breath of night blows soft indeed,
And the jolly yellow moon doth shine.

The hearty tone implied by the title and the appeal to his 'comrades' is accompanied by another deliberate use of archaisms - 'mead', 'couch', 'kine', 'doth' (which is also a feebly expanded verb form), and by the inversion of 'roam we'. None of these adds positively to the poem. On the contrary, it remains a self-consciously written curiosity.

Graves romantic imagination and creative process are particularly interesting in 'In the Wilderness', the only poem from Over the Brazier to survive in the 1975 Collected Poems, and also the earliest of his own poems on which he has written a critical commentary. [146] The popularity of this youthful work seems to have embarrassed the writer, for he dismissed it in Goodbye To All That (1929) as 'a silly quaint poem', observing at the same time that it had already appeared in at least seventy anthologies. [147] A year before this Graves had collaborated with Laura Riding to produce A Pamphlet Against Anthologies, and not surprisingly they chose 'In the Wilderness' for examination as an example of the debasement and false emphasis to which a poem is exposed by the contrived prominence it receives in anthologies. We are told:

> It ('In the Wilderness') was written in a crowded room when the author was just nineteen, with official stationery and gramophone intermissions. The subject was suggested by a reproduction in a Christmas supplement, of Holman Hunt's 'Scapegoat'. This public setting for the birth of the poem may have had something to do with its subsequent popularity: public sentiment somehow

144. Ibid., p.10.
145. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), p.4.
146. OB (1916), p.15.
147. GBTAT (1929), p.33.

> infiltrated. We would not say that the poem was deliberately dishonest in its conception, but it certainly is made to appear so by its being anthologized; and now even its author can only with difficulty remember the genuine feelings that provided it with a nucleus. [148]

The theme of the poem is straightforward enough. It describes Christ in the wilderness and shows how he identifies with the outcasts of the animal kingdom, and above all with the 'guileless old scapegoat' which, according to Leviticus 16:21-22, was used symbolically by the priests to bear away the sins of the Children of Israel. Historically, there is no evidence of this episode. In the New Testament, Christ is solitary during his withdrawal into the desert. Furthermore, as Graves has added in the revised edition of Goodbye To All That (1957), it would have been impossible for Christ to have encountered the scapegoat as it roamed the desert since it 'always got pushed over a cliff by its Levite attendants'. [149] Factual impossibility is not the most important observation to be made here, however. What we are seeing is Graves's first recorded use of an important method of creation. He is imaginatively unifying two separate events in order to offer a poetic comment on the nature of Christ. There is more to be remarked upon in the technique of 'In the Wilderness'. Douglas Day observed that 'there is much here that is derivative' and suggests that line eighteen, 'Great rats on leather wings' - especially after it was revised in Poems 1914-1926 [150] to 'Great bats on leathern wings' - is reminiscent of the 'weak-eyed bat' which 'flits by on leathern wing' in William Collins' 'Ode to Evening'. [151] In his book, Robert Graves, J.M. Cohen detected 'a distant model' in 'Goblin Market', although he carefully qualified this by adding that 'it does not exactly catch Christina Rossetti's measure and it does not echo any of her lines'. [152] Skelton's influence may also perhaps be seen in the dactyllic metre and economical form of the poem. None of the critics, however, appears to have paid much attention to a comment in A Pamphlet Against Anthologies:

> Little thought was necessary after the first three lines; it only required a quaint assemblage of desert animals recalled from Isaiah, and a grafting of the love-of-animals theme on the Christ theme to help it out. There is a loose equation of Christ with the scapegoat, and the scapegoat weeps like Blake's Lion when he found himself in an equally tender relationship with Lyca in the Songs of Innocence. And that is all. [153]

148. Laura Riding and Robert Graves, A Pamphlet Against Anthologies (1928), pp.91-
149. GBTAT (1929, revised 1957, rptd.1966), p.21.
150. P 1914-1926 (1927), pp.4-5.
151. Day, Swifter Than Reason (1963), pp.7-8.
152. * Please see additional notes.
and
153. Chapter Two, p.236

Bearing this in mind, let us look at the poem more closely.

Christ of his gentleness
Thirsting and hungering
Walked in the wilderness.

The phrase 'of his gentleness' is unusual and may suggest, perhaps, that Christ is undergoing this trial as a result of his gentleness, or that owing to his gentleness he is prepared to go into the desert. In the introduction to the Collected Poems (1938), the first line is altered to 'He, of his gentleness', and it seems likely that the replacement of 'Christ' by 'He' may relate to the poet's accompanying remark that 'In the Wilderness' was 'my last Christian-minded poem'.[154] The emphasis on Christ is reduced, and at the same time the change deletes one of the four 's' sounds which occurred in the first five words of the original poem.

Soft words of grace He spoke
Unto lost desert-folk
That listened wondering.

The 'desert-folk' are 'lost' both literally and metaphorically, yet Christ identifies with them:

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,
With mail of dread device,
With monstrous barbed stings,
With eager dragon eyes.

In Isaiah 14:23, when the prophet is foretelling God's vengeance on Assyria, we read:

I will also make it a possession for the bittern,
and pools of water; and I will sweep it with the besom
of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts.

and in 34:11 there is a further reference to the bittern as an inhabitant of the waste land after God's punishment has taken place. The 'ruined palace wall' is implied in 13:21 - 'But wild beasts of the

154. CP (1938), p.xvi.

desert shall be there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures', - and directly referred to in 23:13:

> Behold the land of the Chaldeans; this people was not, till the Assyrian founded it for them that dwell in the wilderness: they set up the towers thereof, they raised up the palaces thereof; and he brought it to ruin;

and again in 34:13:

> And thorns shall come up in her palaces, nettles and brambles in the fortresses thereof and it shall be an habitation of dragons, and a court for owls.

There is no specific reference to the 'she-pelican' in Isaiah, though in Psalm 102:6 the writer, lamenting his condition, says, 'I am like a pelican of the wilderness', and there may also be a literary allusion to King Lear (3.IV.75). According to the O.E.D. the piety of the pelican refers to the way in which the mother bird is supposed to wound her own breast in order to feed her young with her blood, and this in turn has been used figuratively as an image of Christ reviving the dead in spirit by His blood. Thus, the choice of the she-pelican fits easily into the context of the poem.

The basilisk is not mentioned by name in Isaiah either, but there are several references to cockatrices, and the dictionary makes it clear that the two names are used in English without any clear distinction. Chapter eleven, where the coming of Christ is foretold, and unity between men and animals is promised, reads (v.8): 'And the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den'. In the passage which warns of the punishment that will descend on Assyria, the prophet says:

> Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent. (14:29).

Finally, condemning the sins of the Jews, Isaiah wrote:

> They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he that eateth of their eggs dieth, and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper. (59:5).

If we consider this evidence alongside Graves's admission of the influence of Holman Hunt's picture, we may even hazard a speculation on how the two sources came together in his mind. We have seen that chapter thirty-four of Isaiah contains ideas that relate clearly to the

poem, and it is the very next chapter which begins with the well-known verse: 'The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.' The chapter then goes on to describe the coming of holiness and new life to the wilderness. It does not seem too fanciful to suggest that this idea may have triggered off the association between Old and New Testament sources made in the poem.

'The Little Girl Lost',[155] which is classified as a Song of Experience - rather than a Song of Innocence, as Graves said - has a certain obvious similarity of situation to that depicted in 'In the Wilderness'. Lyca, like Christ, is surrounded by normally fierce and unfriendly creatures, and, as he stated, Graves replaced the emotion of Blake's Lion with that of the scapegoat:

> Leopards, tygers, play
> Round her as she lay,
> While the lion old
> Bow'd his mane of gold
>
> And her bosom lick,
> And upon her neck
> From his eyes of flame
> Ruby tears there came.

Despite its unsuspected complexity 'In the Wilderness' remains of limited worth. Its emotion is sentimental and immature, though typical of Graves's earliest surviving poetry, But it is interesting in that it shows something of how his mind has worked from the outset, fusing ideas from apparently unrelated sources.

The poet's unchallenged fancifulness and sentimentality in these first poems were shortlived, but for a time the self-indulgent, day-dream world of children remained very important to him. In Goodbye To All That, Graves noted that he and Sassoon

> defined the war in our poems by making contrasted definitions of peace. With Siegfried it was hunting and nature and music and pastoral scenes; with me it was chiefly children. When I was in France I used to spend much of my spare time playing with the French children of the villages in which I was billeted. I put them into my poems and my own childhood at Harlech.[156]

155. William Blake, Complete Poetry and Prose, ed. G. Keynes (1927, 4th ed., n.d.), pp.67-8.
156. GBTAT (1929), p.289.

In such works as 'Mr. Philosopher' and 'I'd Like to be a Fairy's Child' he continued to assume that the ideal, protected world of childhood without disappointments was still valid for him, though there is an increasing awareness that the simple life had gone. At best there were memories, but even these were clouded by a sense of loss. This feeling is conveyed in 'Babylon', first published in Goliath and David and then in Fairies and Fusiliers.[157] The title refers to the ancient and exotic city of the Chaldees, which is also known as a sort of child's paradise (c.f. the nursery-rhyme, 'How many miles to Babylon?'[158]). In the opening line the poet takes an attitude that again recalls William Blake's ideas:

> The child alone a poet is:
> Spring and Fairyland are his.
> Truth and Reason show but dim,
> And all's poetry to him.

The opposition of 'Truth', which one takes to mean 'Worldly Wisdom' or 'Fact' in this context, and 'Reason' to 'Poetry' is a time honoured premise of romantic writers. What exactly it means for Graves becomes clearer as the succeeding lines describe how, 'For the lad of one-and-twenty', Spring is

> Just a cheery pleasant season,
> Daisy buds to live at ease on.
> He's forgotten how he smiled
> And shrieked at snowdrops when a child,
> Or wept one evening secretly
> For April's glorious misery.

The young man's emotional responses become less direct, more complex and more defensive as he grows up. This results from his acquisition of Wisdom, which 'made a breach and battered/Babylon to bits'. The choice of a military metaphor is significant, for, of course, it was the war that destroyed Graves's Babylon . Not only are the emotions of childhood corrupted, but also legendary heroes and villains of infancy are driven out. Even

> ... Sir Galahad lies hid
> In a cave with Captain Kidd.

A whole world is defeated, leaving only 'a few ghosts of timorous heart' to lament 'lost Babylon'. As we know already, ghosts in the form of neurasthenic nightmares whichwere far from timorous played an important

157. GD (1916), pp.8-9 and FF (1917), pp.14-5.
158. ed.I. and P.Opie, The Oxford Nursery Rhyme Book (1955, rptd. 1967), p.121.

part in the poet's life after the war. For the moment, however, the dominant feeling is of a saddening loss rather than violent haunting.

We are given a rather different insight into what Graves felt had disappeared, and what he longed for in the chaos of battle, in 'Limbo'.[159] The title signifies the writer's loss of bearings brought about by the war. The sonnet opens with ten lines evoking the misery and squalor of the trenches more effectively than usual, however tame the description may seem in comparison with those of Owen or Sassoon:

> After a week spent under raining skies,
> In horror, mud and sleeplessness, a week
> Of bursting shells, of blood and hideous cries
> And the ever-watchful sniper: where the reek
> Of death offends the living...

In the revised version of 1920, the atmosphere is somewhat compromised by the comparison of trench rats, grown fat on human flesh, with kittens.[160] Most people would not associate kittens with the kind of enormities perpetrated by the rats, and this particular simile confuses rather than illuminates the point. The original poem successfully maintained the sense of horrific reality by quoting the words of a dying man: ' ... Parapet's too low,/Collect those bodies..quick..build them up there! ' In the last four lines Graves tells of the relief that comes when the company is suddenly withdrawn from the front line:

> And then one night relief comes, and we go
> Miles back into the sunny cornland where
> Babies like tickling, and where tall white horses
> Draw the plough leisurely in quiet courses.

The effect of the change is seen in various ways. There is the switch from a generalised description of life in the trenches to a highly particularised and individual account of what momentary peace means to the poet. Michael Kirkham cites 'Limbo' as an example of a poem 'in which the poet's relationships with children are seen as supplying the reassurance he needs'.[161] This should not distract us from these images which Graves offers as instances of normal and enduring behaviour, rather in the way that Hardy offered images of the continuity of life in 'In Time of "The Breaking of Nations" '. Graves reinforces his effects by relaxing the pace of the closing lines and by adopting a vocabulary which is dominated by soft vowel-sounds. Although it may be argued that the wish to escape from the reality of war is the motivating force behind 'Limbo',

159. OB (1916), p.22.
160. OB (1916, rptd. 1920), p.23.
161. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.22.

there is a measure of success in the contrast between life in the trenches and rural delights.

However, the poem which is perhaps Graves's best evocation of childhood did not appear until 1921, after the war was over and when the poet already had a family of his own for whom he was writing poems such as 'A Song for Two Children' and 'Baloo loo for Jenny'.[162] 'Allie', which has been retained almost without change in collections throughout the years, is modelled on a form of nursery-rhyme. It opens with the girl being told to call the birds in, and then repeats the pattern in the second and third stanzas as she calls in the beasts and the fish.[163] Then, in the final stanza, the poet introduces a personal detail which transforms the poem into a moving recollection of his own youth:

> Allie, call the children,
> Children from the green.
> Allie calls, Allie sings,
> Soon they run in.
> First there came
> Tom and Madge
> Kate and I who'll not forget
> How we played by the water's edge
> Till the April sun set.

Like Blake's poem, 'The Echoing Green', which it recalls, 'Allie' is a delightful recreation of the sheltered, simple world of childhood, and its achievement is related to the poet's unpretentious approach to his theme. The rhymes, rhythms and structure, with the opening two lines of instruction and the subsequent description of what happens, closely follow the style of nursery-poetry. There is no conflict between the subject and the vocabulary of the poem. It was this piece which led Louis Golding to claim in his review of Country Sentiment that

> with a poem so cunning-simple..., Mr. Graves stands certainly alone in this generation, and alone in English poetry. It is a late exquisite flowering - for which who could have dared to hope? - of nursery-rhyme, standing thereto in something of the same relation as 'The Ancient Mariner' or 'Keith Ravelston' to early ballad.[164]

High praise indeed, but although the scale of achievement is obviously smaller, Golding's remark is not wholly unjust.

If whimsicality or even sentimentality coloured much of Graves's response to memories of childhood, they do not form a complete account

162. CS (1920), p.13 and p.42.
163. Ibid., pp.33-4.
164. L. Golding, Voices 3 (May 1920), 167-68.

of it. Poems like 'Alice', 'Warning to Children' and 'The Cool Web' are written from an adult's point of view, but show awareness and - at least in 'Alice' - admiration for the child's capacity to move easily between what we consider the 'real' world and the world behind the looking glass, or 'lubberland', as Graves calls it. The children are warned not to try and unwrap the mysterious parcel of life systematically, but to preserve their sense of wonder and acceptance without 'an irritable reaching after fact and reason'. Alice is 'the prime heroine of our nation' because she has a fuller and richer knowledge of life than the philosopher who reduces it to

> Three blank walls, a barred window with no view,
> A ceiling within reach of the raised hands,
> A floor blank as the walls. [165]

The ugly, tall philosopher 'With bright red hair' who appears in Fairies and Fusiliers was a wiser man than his successor described above, for he recognised the importance of playing at lions and tigers with Ben and Claire as well as writing books. [166] His combined capacity for imaginative play and philosophy shows that he values the limitless possibilities of 'lubberland', but also acknowledges the need for the 'cool web of language' which prevents each of us from living in a merely subjective fantasy world of uncontrolled experience.

In later poems Graves's view of children is not sentimental, but complex and stimulating, and its influence may perhaps be seen indirectly in 'The Terraced Valley'. There the unreal world in which the separated lover temporarily finds himself is another version of 'lubberland'. On that occasion, as we saw, it is less welcome, and the poet does not rejoice in his easy movement from the real to the fantastic and back again, as he did in the earlier and more impersonal poem, 'Alice'. Rather, he celebrates his escape back to normality from an increasingly frightening state of mind.

Graves's refusal to romanticise and his insistence on unadorned facts - which do not preclude his continuing belief in the reality of 'lubberland' - become a general trend in his later work, and are not restricted to his treatment of children. Thus, for example, in 'An English Wood'he revives references to harpies, gryphons and a roc - all of which might belong to the scene set in 'In the Wilderness' - but does so only to say that there are no monsters or abnormalities seen in the tame 'set shape of things' of an English rural landscape: [167]

165. CP (1938), p.136.
166. FF (1917), pp.16-7.
167. W (1923), p.35.

Only the lawns are soft,
The tree-stems, grave and old.
Slow branches sway aloft,
The evening air comes cold,
The sunset scatters gold.
Small grasses toss and bend,
Small pathways idly tend
Towards no certain end.

It is a curious fact that a poet who, more than most twentieth-century writers, has concerned himself with images of ghosts, mermaids, monsters and fiends should also be attracted to the unsensational and commonplace, and be eager to celebrate it. He has seen himself, as he puts it in another poem, as an awkward gardener, possessed of

... something, though he called it nothing -
An ass's wit, a hairy-belly shrewdness
That could appraise the intentions of the angel
By the very distance of his own confusion
And bring the most to pass. [168]

As with the image of the cabbage butterfly in 'Flying crooked', this picture of a slightly cumbersome labourer who nevertheless has a kind of homely peasant intuition may strike one as being at odds with what we know of Graves's background, yet it is an idea that appeals to him. It is not so strange when one considers the poet's respect for the skill of craftsmen of whatever variety. He has written:

craftsmanship presupposes (the factor of magic). A journeyman, after seven years as an apprentice, will get the feel of his materials and learn what quiet miracles can be done with them. A small part of this knowledge is verbally communicable; the rest is incommunicable - except to fellow-craftsmen who already possess it. [169]

The awkward gardener's skill is of the sort described above, only partly communicable, but unmistakably real and valuable.

Intuitional good sense and judgement are highly rated by Graves, as is clear in 'The Poets', better known by its revised title, 'Any Honest Housewife'. [170] The 'honest housewife' has an untaught ability to tell the good from the bad,

Having a nose for fish, an eye for apples.
Is it any mystery who are the sound,
And who the rotten? Never, by her lights.

168. P 1914-1927 (1927), p.224.
169. Graves, Mammon and the Black Goddess (1965), p.74.
170. CP (1938), p.148.

It is, of course, significant that Graves attributes this quality particularly to women, and it may be seen as a variation on Laura Riding's idea of women as 'inside' people. One imagines that the great-grandmother celebrated in the poem of the same name was, in her day, a typical 'honest housewife'.[171] She is presented as a kind of earth mother who has suffered the misunderstandings of her son and grandsons because of the closeness of family bonds and her reluctance to damage these, but who is freed by the passage of time to act as truth-teller to her great-grandchildren:

> Though to your grandfather, her son, she lied
> And to your father disingenuously
> Told half the tale as the whole,
> Yet she was honest with herself,
> Knew disclosure was not yet due,
> Knows it is due now.

Having 'outlasted all man-uses', she is

> Happy and idle like a port
> After the sea's recession,
> She does not misconceive the nature
> Of shipmen or of ships.

She has never lost her stubborn independence and the honest insight into the nature of life which men lack, and, she knows, will continue to lack, 'drifting/On tides of fancy still'. Michael Kirkham has ventured that

> this woman's sour honesty, unsentimentality, clear-sighted distrust of men's 'false-innocence', singleness of purpose and taut but unrelenting opposition to a male-dominated world make this poem a more complete embodiment of Graves's own disillusionment with masculine values than any other.[172]

Graves admires her, or any honest housewife, for her integrity to herself although she belongs to an everyday world where food must be bought wisely and children must be carried, born and raised.

It is fitting to close this section, however, by mentioning one poem in which, perhaps more clearly than usual, Graves sings the virtues of ordinary homely living. 'The China Plate' tells the story of a plate 'ransomed for a few coppers' from 'a crowded barrow in a street-market', where it was recognised by its pot-bank sign as a valuable collector's item.[173] Having been shown how the past history of the plate - its remarkable rescue from the 'barrow-hearse' - dominates its later existence,

171. Ibid., pp.187-88.
172. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.167.
173. CP (1938), p.154.

the poet pleads for it not to be given special treatment:

Enough, permit the treasure to forget
The emotion of that providential purchase,
Becoming a good citizen of the house
Like its fellow-crockery.

Let it dispense sandwiches at a party
And not be noticed in the drunken buzz,
Or little cakes at afternoon tea
When cakes are in demand.

Let it regain a lost habit of life,
Foreseeing death in honourable breakage
Somewhere between the kitchen and the shelf-
To be sincerely mourned.

Kirkham says that the tone of this poem represents Robert Graves's 'moral realism'.[174] Death, or, in the context of the poem, breakage, is accepted without protest, and yet not simply in a spirit of resignation. Breakage is 'honourable', 'To be sincerely mourned', more especially if it follows a life as 'a good citizen of the house'. This is preferable to a withdrawal from daily experience, for 'a glass case', we are told, is not 'less sepulchral' than a 'barrow-hearse'. Here Graves unambiguously welcomes experience, readily acknowledging that rough comes with smooth and prepared to accept the fact. But above all it is notable that the experience he wishes to encounter is defined in terms of conventional domestic living. There is no longing for the freakish or sensational, but rather for the normal and everyday. Indeed, in conclusion, it seems reasonable to suggest that Graves's enduring affection and respect for the mundane is at least in part a reflection of and a reaction to his equally real experience of the irrational and emotionally distressing.

174. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.157.

Conclusion.

Conclusion.

The introduction to this study noted that from as early as the publication of the 1938 Collected Poems critics questioned the range and importance of Robert Graves's poetry. The investigation of the poet's evolving theory and practice between 1914 and 1938, and of some of his characteristic themes and interests, makes it apparent that the lives of few writers have been more closely bound up with their work than in the case of Graves. As he has never extended the autobiography he published in 1929, and has disclosed little or nothing of his collaboration with Laura Riding and domestic life since he first left England, his poetry is the most complete record of his life. However, because it is as individual and unconcerned with public opinion as anything he has written, Goodbye To All That remains an invaluable key to understanding the background in which Graves grew up, and his reactions against it. We learn from it that although he became critical of the attitudes enshrined in Charterhouse, of the mismanagement of events in the First World War, and of social values in England of the 1920's, Graves has always been very much the child of his environment despite these superficial appearances to the contrary. This point - and it will be suggested that it is of fundamental importance in appreciating his work - may be illustrated in several ways.

It has been Graves's justifiable boast that with the exception of his one short spell of teaching in Egypt, he has lived by his writing. He has said that after he was discharged from the army at the end of the First World War, he vowed that he would never again place himself in a position of having to take orders.[1] This kind of wish is familiar to many people, though few have the strength of character and actual ability to translate it into fact. Graves's manner and style of independence have been characterised by the hauteur and the intuitive, unpretentious self-confidence that are a mark of real aristocracy and breeding. As Mr. Turveydrop said, 'A levelling age is not favourable to Deportment', but unlike that particular gentleman's polish, Graves's is wholly real and identifiable as such even in these times. Graves has not been ashamed to acknowledge his social position, as may be seen, for example, in 'The Cloak', where he presents an image of himself as an exiled lord. It is found again in 'A Country Mansion', where the poet defines his relationship with his long-established family and his native land.[2] To some, such as Richard Church, this has appeared merely as arrogance, and

1. Graves, Poetic Craft and Principle (1967), p.109.
2. See Chapter One, pp. 97-8 and Chapter Two, pp.116-17.

they are disposed to point it out in a work like 'To the Reader Over My Shoulder' ;[3] but Graves has never felt it necessary to condescend to the terms of weaker-minded and less independent folk. W.H. Auden wrote:

> To read his poems is both a joy and a privilege; they are passionate, truthful, and well-bred.[4]

The qualities he attributed to the poems are also those of their writer.

Martin Seymour-Smith has observed that the racial ancestry of Robert Graves, which he outlined in the opening chapter of Goodbye To All That, is also a salient factor in accounting for his personality with its strong elements both of rationalism and of romanticism.[5] His Germanic descent on his mother's side from the Von Rankes is taken by Seymour-Smith to have given him the sceptical and rational mode of thought basic to much of his work, while the Irish connections of the Graves family are allegedly responsible for his superstitious, romantic, and often haunted or melancholic imaginings. However much or little truth there may be in this genetic argument, we have seen Graves's unusual and distinguishing ability to make use of apparently opposed modes of thought at almost every stage in his work. The monsters, mermaids, fiends, dragons, and other fabulous creatures which have populated many of his poems sometimes appear rather as mere labels than as beings credible in their own right. An example of this is the use of dragons, fiends and mermaids in 'Old Wives' Tales', which amounts to little more than a mechanical classifying of particular psychological phenomena. But, on the contrary, the dragon and the toad mentioned in 'Vanity' are rich with meaning, and are exploited for their supernatural associations in a poem which is basically concerned to make a rational, common-sense statement on the theme of life's insecurity and unpredictability. Similarly, the grotesque succubus in the poem of the same name provides an image of the poet's own lust and leads him to a sober evaluation of his feelings. Apart from the earliest and most fanciful pieces, Graves has seldom allowed the romantic side of his imagination to operate in a purely escapist way. Rather, he learnt to harness his imaginative powers to illuminate and vitalize certain common sense perceptions into the nature of love and life. This has given some of his best work - one thinks of poems like 'Pure Death', 'The Cool Web', 'The Presence', 'Vanity', or 'Sick Love' - their uncanny power. As Ronald Gaskell has written:

3. Richard Church, Fortnightly Review, 135 (26 March, 1931),419-20.
4. W.H. Auden, Shenandoah, 13 (Winter 1962), 6-11.
5. Martin Seymour-Smith, Robert Graves (1956, rev.1970), p.6.

> There are hints in his work of the irrational, the unexplainable, which are all the more disturbing because the argument of the poems is markedly rational, the tone sceptical, the form regular. [6]

Of course, the greatest triumph of Graves's power to yoke together imaginative and historical truth is The White Goddess, which stands as his equivalent to Yeats's A Vision or Wallace Stevens' 'supreme fiction'. It has been argued previously that, remarkable as the myth of the White Goddess is, it is not surprising that Robert Graves has been the person to 'recognize' its importance and to assemble it from fragments of antiquity.[7] For most, it is an astonishing mixture of historical argument and imaginative ingenuity, but however sceptical one may be, it is difficult to dismiss it in its entirety. Similarly, who would say that Yeats's A Vision is mere chicanery? The very fact that two highly intelligent men have found these wayward beliefs important aids in the organization and shaping of their poetry gives them a measure of validity. George Steiner has questioned whether Graves himself seriously believes in the Goddess, and has even suggested that it is a typical example of the Irish ability to contrive prolonged and impeccably argued jokes told with complete seriousness. [8] By this reckoning, Graves is in the line of Swift, Goldsmith, Synge, Joyce and Flann O'Brien. But surely this view overlooks the Germanic aspect of his personality, that part of him which finds it hard, even impossible, to laugh at his own eccentricities? Asked if he believed in the reality of the White Goddess, Graves's reply was at once clever and unrevealing. He told Steiner:

> Whether God is a metaphor or a fact cannot be reasonably argued: let us likewise be discreet on the subject of the Goddess. [9]

The key word is 'reasonably', for Graves has never accepted that historical fact is absolute. He admits that it leads him to points of departure from which he is prompted to make imaginative assumptions and leaps. This has brought him into conflict with rationalist and scientific scholars not only in the case of The White Goddess, but when he has entered the arena of theological and literary controversy in books such as King Jesus (1946), The Nazarene Gospel Restored (1953) and The Greek Myths (1955). Yet it is also the method of thought behind poems like 'Goliath and David', 'Angry Samson', and 'The Lord Chamberlain Tells of a Famous Meeting'. Here Graves applied imagination to real or supposed historical events in order to reveal the limitations of conventional accounts. Thus he becomes the

6. Ronald Gaskell, Critical Quarterly, 3, No.7 (Autumn 1961), 231-22.
7. See Chapter One, pp.95-6.
8. George Steiner, Kenyon Review, 22 (Summer 1960), 340-65.
9. Ibid.

debunker, who teases out the real truth from the ornamented records. He followed a similar procedure in his novel, Wife to Mr. Milton, and his most famous prose hero, Claudius, is credited with imaginative shrewdness of a kind that seems typically Gravesian.

There is little doubt that the blend of reason and imagination in his work is highly individual, and it is significant that during his lowest ebb as a poet - in the mid-'twenties - he tended to allow reason to outweigh imagination. This was the dilemma from which Laura Riding, who was herself ultimately more philosopher than poet, rescued him. Graves had reached an impasse: it appeared to him that the only valid position was disbelief in the absolute value of anything. Laura Riding's Anarchism Is Not Enough (1928) reflects a similar mood of disillusionment but suggests, paradoxically, that poetry is a unique way of using words which has a value precisely because it has no value in any conventional sense:

> What is a poem? A poem is nothing... It is not an effect (common or uncommon) of experience; it is the result of an ability to create a vacuum in experience - it is a vacuum and therefore nothing. It cannot be looked at, heard, touched or read because it is a vacuum. Since it is a vacuum it is nothing for which the poet can flatter himself or receive flattery... Whenever this vacuum, the poem, occurs, there is agitation on all sides to destroy it, to convert it into something. The conversion of nothing into something is the task of criticism. Literature is the storehouse of these rescued somethings. In discussing literature one has to use, unfortunately, the same language that one uses in discussing experience. But even so, literature is preferable to experience, since it is for the most part the closest one can get to nothing.[10]

The 'agitation' described here is directly related to the unease felt by other people in the enigmatic presence of a muse woman. Graves wrote on this theme in 'Against Kind', and developed it with greater subtlety in 'On Portents'. One can appreciate why he found Laura Riding's views immediately stimulating in the late 'twenties, for whereas she endorsed his rejection of contemporary values, she restored his belief in poetry itself. As George Stade has written, she

> showed him how to recover value without submitting to group value, and how to recover his faith in poetry without compromising his scepticism about anything else.[11]

10. Laura Riding, Anarchism Is Not Enough (1928), pp.16-7.
11. George Stade, Robert Graves (1967), p.25.

The origins of Graves's disillusionment go back to the years of the First World War, another major formative experience in his life. Indeed, Alfred Alvarez would have us believe that not only was it the formative experience for the young man, but also effectively killed him as a poet.[12] Although he admires Graves's work, he regards it as a kind of posthumous legacy from the 1914-1918 period. There can be little doubt that certain of Graves's attitudes and some of the qualities of character he has set store by throughout his adult life derive from his service in France. There he quickly learnt to respect courage, self-discipline and regimental tradition - perhaps a forerunner of his devotion to quite another kind of tradition or myth. Violent death became familiar to him only a few months after he had left school, and of course his narrow escape permitted him to experience, and subsequently contemplate, his own mortality from exceptionally close quarters. Although his faith in the war as a cause wavered as time went on, Graves might have appeared mentally and emotionally to survive events remarkably well. He was not, for instance, nervously distressed to the same extent that Sassoon was. Yet, as we know, Graves was a victim of severe neurasthenia, and it is important to appreciate the guilt he felt as an ex-soldier who respected bravery and endurance, but who was reduced to helpless fear by his bad dreams. The poems in which he sought to come to terms with his nightmares - for example, 'Ghost Raddled', 'The Pier-Glass', 'Down', among many others - were his first endeavours to search out and discipline the truth behind his experience. Often these efforts were fumbling and inadequate, but they become progressively more articulate. Despite their origins in the after-effects of war the poems are not all as limited as Alvarez implies, for Graves found universal human elements in his own experience and emotions. When he writes of insecurity or fear or love or lust or time, he writes about things we all recognize, and if some of his stoicism derives from the war, and some of his characteristic attitudes developed during the time of his neurosis and in the disappointing world of the 'twenties in England, these facts in themselves do not limit his work any more than Alexander Solzhenitsyn's fiction is limited because it derives largely from his prison life in Stalin's labour camps. On the contrary, if, as Ronald Gaskell argues, the effects of the war are seen in 'his respect for courage, his distrust of generalizations, his acceptance of pain and hardship as normal', these have helped him positively in defining those areas of experience he has chosen to explore.[13] The war did have a

12. Alfred Alvarez, The Shaping Spirit (1958, rptd. 1967), p.140.
13. Gaskell, Critical Quarterly, 3, No.7 (Autumn 1961), 213-22.

basic effect on Graves - it is impossible to imagine how he would have developed without his years in the trenches -, but if the White Goddess descends from a rare combination of the influences of the Great War, neurasthenia, W.H.R. Rivers, Basanta Mallik, and Laura Riding, the myth is a richer and more complex whole than any of its respective parts.

The fact that his poetry was in a state of crisis when Graves met Laura Riding was only one aspect of a general personal crisis.[14] His domestic and financial arrangements were insecure, and he had lost several close friends. The mid-'twenties were probably the years in which he felt most negatively cut off from other people. In general, Graves has made a virtue of isolation, but at this stage he seems to have been more a victim of circumstances. His relationship with Laura Riding enabled him to see exile as a positive, chosen course of action rather than a decision forced upon him. The distinction is important for it radically affected his attitude to life.

Laura Riding herself appears to have shown increasing confidence in exile, for her second lengthy prose work, The World and Ourselves (1938), is written from a more affirmative standpoint than Anarchism Is Not Enough. In the latter book she praised poetry for what it is not, whereas during the 'thirties her statements became more positively biased. She declared that

> New rules, new definitions are left to inside people... The inside functions are unambiguously those of administering the general values of existence; and they are entitled not merely to an inherited sacredness, as successors of the traditional spiritual functions, but to a practical respect - in consideration of their immediate responsibility for the temper of existence as a whole.[15]

Indeed, the construction and purpose of The World and Ourselves are aimed at establishing and illustrating 'inside' qualities and attitudes because

> It is the responsibility of the people of the First Order, the active inside people, to define goodness in terms of people: to show what a good person is, to be good people themselves, to help others to have the personal goodness of which they are capable.[16]

The author is no longer as defensive as she was in Anarchism Is Not Enough, and one feels that, whatever may have happened after 1938, during the earlier years of that decade when Graves was achieving his

14. See Chapter One, p.80.
15. Laura Riding, The World and Ourselves (1938), p.286 and p.298.
16. Ibid., p.374.

'poetic liberation' and discovering new, if circumspect, confidence and a deepening awareness of love, Laura Riding's thought was also enriched and given fresh urgency.

Graves's dedication to Laura Riding and his identification of her as his muse-woman is increasingly evident in his poems of the 'thirties. Clearly he believed that she had fulfilled in him the obligation allegedly incumbent upon 'inside' people: she had helped him to the personal goodness of which he was capable. This may be illustrated by the words he wrote in 'To Whom Else?' :

> 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? [17]

The mixture of cruelty and kindness attributed to the muse woman here is characteristic also of the White Goddess. The Goddess is, amongst other things, an elevation of the muse-woman to the realm of myth. Laura Riding was for Graves the prime example of such a woman, as, he tells us in The Crowning Privilege, Fanny Brawne was for Keats, Annette Vallon for Wordsworth, and Mary Joyce for John Clare.[18] One of the anticipatory features of the myth in the poet's earlier work is his attitude to Laura Riding herself. The vocabulary of the poems about her or to her, and the position that he himself adopted towards her, prefigure the worshipful awe of the dedicated servant of the Goddess. The poem quoted above, 'To Whom Else?', might be described as a kind of profane prayer, for the poet's self-abnegation and humility might more normally be associated with worship of a deity. There is a similar tendency in 'Against Kind' where he tells how

> They raged at her that being invisible
> She would not use that gift, not humouring them
> As Lilith, or as an idiot poltergeist,
> Or as a Gyges turning the ring's bezel.

17. TWE? (1931), p.13.
18. Graves, The Crowning Privilege (1955, rptd. 1959), p.64, p.67, and p.293.

She gave no sign; they therefore tumbled prostrate
Fawning on her, confessing but their sins,
They burned her the occasion's frankincense
Crying 'save, save! ' but she was yet discrete.

And she must stay discrete, as they are blind
For ever, or for one time less than ever
If they, despaired and turning against kind,
Become invisible too, and read her mind. [19]

If one compares this with 'Possessed', a poem written after the revelation of the White Goddess, it is plain that Graves's attitude is basically unchanged:

To be possessed by her is to possess -
Though rooted in this thought
Build nothing on it.

Unreasonable faith becomes you
And mute endurance
Even of betrayal.[20]

The self-abasement of the devotée and his recognition of the woman's superiority are continued from the earlier work. Not only this, but the necessity of the poet's unquestioning loyalty and service - his 'Unreasonable faith/ And mute endurance', as they are called in the quotation above - is important. In poems of the 'thirties such as 'To the Sovereign Muse', 'The Challenge', and 'The Stranger', as well as in 'To Whom Else?', this theme is reiterated. Dedication to the White Goddess at whatever cost is an essential part of the myth, and the continuity may again be illustrated by juxtaposing examples of work from earlier and later periods. In 'To the Sovereign Muse' Graves wrote:

And we confessed that since you came
We might no longer feign and stutter
As poets of the passionate chance,
Nor claim the indulgence of the hour.
Our tongues must prompter be than those
That wag with modish lamentation -
Or lost men, otherwise, and renegades
To our confession, maudlin-sane must die
Suicides on the stair of yesterday. [21]

Years later he published a poem with the significant title 'Expect Nothing':

19. P 1929 (1929), pp.11-2.
20. CP (1975), p.235.
21. CP (1938), p.180.

Give, ask for nothing, hope for nothing,
Subsist on crumbs, though scattered casually
Not for you (she smiles) but for the birds.
Though only a thief's diet, it staves off
Dire starvation, nor does she grow fat
On the bread she crumbles, while the lonely truth
Of love is honoured, and her word pledged.[22]

In both cases, and in many others, the lover's subjection is complete. Furthermore, to struggle against this subjection is taken only as a sign of ignorance and blindness. It is a sacred necessity and would only be tolerable to a man with the stoicism which Graves has already been observed to possess. Commenting in his Oxford Addresses on Poetry on the need for unquestioning submission to the muse woman, he said:

A dedicated poet sees history as a dangerous deviation from the true course of human life - an attempt to deny women their age-old moral ascendancy. A poet's absolute love, his readiness to trust in woman's wisdom, whatever may ensue, represent a nostalgia for human truth.[23]

This faith in an act of self-surrender is fundamental to Graves's view of poetry. In the early 'twenties, he believed that poems were the therapeutic resolutions of emotional conflicts to which the poet must yield. With the development of his interest in less emotionally intense poetry, he temporarily regarded it as a witty, rationalistic means of commenting on the paradoxical nature of experience. But with the coming of Laura Riding and the emergence of his faith in the muse woman and later in the White Goddess, Graves found a lastingly vital source of stimulus for his imagination.

An attempt has been made to instance certain links between the poems written by Graves to his muse woman in the 'thirties and later works dedicated to the Goddess. One further argument remains to be made on this issue. There is clear evidence that even before his separation from Laura Riding, Graves had begun to think of her in mythological or legendary terms. The finest example of this is 'On Portents' - first published as early as 1931 - where the power of the woman is described obliquely by reference to the 'strange things' that may happen 'where she is', and which

...are not to be wondered at,
Being tourbillions in Time made
By the strong pulling of her bladed mind
Through that ever-reluctant element.[24]

22. CP (1975), p.255.
23. Graves, Oxford Addresses on Poetry (1962), p.63.
24. TWE? (1931), p.19.

The use of the word 'portents' and the reference to classic examples of graves opening, the dead walking, and future generations being born - which are images of the overthrow of the normal restrictions of time - are rich with association. They elevate the muse woman above common humanity, as had the prose-poems - called 'As It Were Poems' - in the same collection. Much later, writing of the Goddess, Graves attributed the same ability to defy time to her, concluding a poem called 'In Her Praise' with the line:

Woman is mortal woman. She abides. [25]

Similarly, 'The Age of Certainty' - where the muse woman is associated with Andromeda, Atalanta, a she-Proteus, Niobe and Helen - was significantly retitled 'New Legends', [26] and in 'The Challenge' the poet tells how a rebellious young ruler is haunted and unsatisfied until he recognises the goddess-like supremacy and restorative power of the moon. We know that the moon has constantly been presented as an influential force in Graves's work, and is associated with love and the pains of love; also that the White Goddess is another title for the moon. The ruler's challenge to the moon is futile and misguided, and before he acquires recognition of this fact, his authority and noble style of life disintegrate. He loses his hawk and horse, representing the decline of his social position and nobility, and we are told how not only does his country become a waste land and his palace a ruin, but he himself becomes unkempt and lonely. Order is restored, as it is in 'The Terraced Valley', as soon as the man realizes his lack of reason and has done penance:

I watched her glide over the mountain peak
And stood dumbfounded by her reasoned look.
With answering reason my sick heart renewed.

So peace fell sudden, and in proof of peace
There sat my flown hawk, hooded on my fist,
And with my knees I gripped my truant horse.

Towards that most clear, unscorching light I spurred.
Whiter and closer shone the increasing disc;
Until it filled the sky, scattering my gaze.

When I might see once more, the day had come
And I was riding through gold harvest-fields,
Towards a rebuilded city and my home. [27]

It is interesting that Graves chose a distinctly medieval setting for this poem, for the whole way in which he has dedicated himself to the

25. CP (1975), p.238.
26. 'The Age of Certainty' in TPM (1930), p.6. 'New Legends' in CP (1938), p.182.
27. CP (1938), pp.176-78.

service of love, whether as muse woman, White Goddess, or Black Goddess, is strongly reminiscent of the medieval poetic tradition commonly known as courtly love. Critics have made surprisingly little of this idea, although G.S. Fraser has mentioned that the use of the word 'squires' in 'Down, Wanton, Down ! ' corresponds to the medieval usage in the context of courtly love, and Michael Kirkham endorses this.[28] But it seems reasonable to suggest that there is a closer continuity of attitude between Graves and the medieval poets of courtly love than has been generally recognized. To demonstrate the point it is worth recalling the words of C.S. Lewis in The Allegory of Love. He outlined the characteristics of courtly love as

> Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. The lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady's lightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence in her rebukes, however unjust, are the only virtues he dares to claim. There is a service of love closely modelled on the service which a vassal owes to his lord. The lover is the lady's 'man'. He addresses her as midons, which etymologically represents not 'my lady' but 'my lord'.[29]

All the ideas here are integral with Graves's understanding of dedication to the muse woman or Goddess. Adultery might appear an exception, but Graves has written:

> The Muse, I have said, is 'the perpetual other woman', never the poet's wife; meaning that the poet-Muse relationship either precedes the patriarchal marriage system, or looks forward to an epoch which must succeed. Patriarchal marriage would put the Muse under his moral sway, a circumstance impossible for her to accept.[30]

Not only does this show that he regards the relationship between poet and muse woman as extramarital, it also reaffirms the need for the woman's complete freedom. C.S. Lewis made precisely the same point about courtly love:

> Conjugal affection cannot be 'love' because there is in it an element of duty or necessity: a wife, in loving her husband, is not exercising her free choice in the reward of merit, and her love cannot therefore increase his probitas... The love which is to be the source of all that is beautiful in life and manners must be the reward freely given by the lady, and only our superiors can reward.[31]

28. Kirkham, The Poetry of Robert Graves (1969), p.140.
29. C.S. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (1936,rptd. 1953), p.2.
30. Graves, Oxford Addresses on Poetry (1962), p.64.
31. Lewis, The Allegory of Love (1936, rptd. 1953), p.36.

Social superiority is not what concerns Graves, but moral superiority; and according to Laura Riding and to Graves, moral superiority is woman's birthright.

The lady in medieval courtly love poems accepted or rejected her lovers on the basis of their moral deserts, and the muse woman and Goddess are understood to wield a similar power. Unlike the medieval lover, the poet does not beg any god or goddess to intercede on his behalf, because, by a curiously Protestant variation on the original, the muse-woman embodies the Goddess, and his plea is made directly to her. Thus it may be seen that although the social and emotional reasons for Graves's beliefs may be different from those that prompted the troubadour poets of medieval times, the actual substance of their respective views is markedly similar.

So far we have attempted to trace aspects of Graves's personality which led him towards the White Goddess myth, but an underlying question remains: why has Graves needed a mythological framework such as that he provided for himself in The White Goddess? To answer this, it is necessary to look back to the immediate post-First World War years when he was influenced by the ideas of W.H.R. Rivers. The overwhelming factor in Graves's life at this period was his neurasthenia, and the nightmares that were symptomatic of it. Rivers' theories enabled Graves to understand the process of poetic composition in a way that satisfied both his emotional and rational needs. The fact remained, however, that Graves's practice and his theory were not necessarily the same. Some of the best poems of these years - 'Ghost Raddled', 'Outlaws', 'Down' - have unresolved, or at least ambiguous, conclusions. Where a solution was imposed - as in the original version of 'The Pier-Glass' - the effect was false and contrived.[32] The important point is that in this phase of his work Graves felt himself to be outside the rest of society because of his illness - later he felt excluded for other reasons - and instinctively sought an external viewpoint with which he could identify. We have observed the sense of guilt that accompanied his neurasthenia, and it is a natural response to seek means of self-justification in such circumstances. For Graves at this stage, self-justification meant justification of his dreams.

Continuing unhappiness and increased social and domestic strains must have helped to persuade him of the inadequacy of Rivers' theories to diagnose his predicament. They also prepared him to accept the

32. See Chapter One, pp.45-9.

resigned attitudes of Basanta Mallik, and the supremacy of relativism proposed by Einstein. Had Graves been first and foremost a philosopher, he might well have been satisfied by these views, but the dull poetry of Mock Beggar Hall shows the artistic difficulties that confronted him. It was only in a work like 'Full Moon', where a powerful emotional experience is successfully married to the intellectual idea, that Graves achieved anything of lasting value. In Welchman's Hose he discovered that irony was a natural literary device to convey a relativist view of life. Thus 'Alice' and 'The Clipped Stater' reveal a new sophistication and wit, but the tone is necessarily self-defensive, for a belief in the relative value of all things and the absolute value of none does not encourage total self-surrender in a relationship. At this period, Graves was most moving when he wrote on the theme of transience, as in 'Vanity' and 'The Presence'. In general, however, he still lacked a personal muse, and this he gained through his association with Laura Riding.

Miss Riding's intellectual beliefs were not profoundly different from those held by Graves, and it appears that, whatever she may have taught him in terms of technical discipline and virtuosity, above all she was a human, lovable embodiment of ideas which before he had only known as abstractions. She enabled Graves to bring together his intellectual attitudes and emotional feelings, so that perhaps for the first time in his life - certainly since the war - he knew the profound satisfaction of being acknowledged and accepted as the person he was. Anthropologists such as Margaret Mead describe how all societies have 'binding on' rituals by which the young are formally initiated into the group and are subsequently recognised as its members. For reasons which have been suggested, Graves did not in this sense become a member of English society after he left that other self-contained society in which he had been proud to be an officer, the Royal Welch Fusiliers. Although he has often been regarded as a fugitive from many of the pressures of twentieth century life, in fact it seems more likely that only in Majorca in the 1930's with Laura Riding did he begin to enjoy a measure of social identity and emotional stability. Thus it is possible to see the myth of the White Goddess in a new light - namely, as the elevation to the level of ritual of the poet's own 'binding on' ceremony. It is hardly surprising that the Goddess is such a harsh and, in many ways, cruel deity, for in that respect she is a fair reflection of Graves's own experience.

Finally, one is left with the poems which mark the stages in the life of this most fascinating and unusual man. While no apology is offered for the continual references to his life story, the ultimate questions are whether his poems stand in their own right, and in what way they are successful. It is perhaps easiest to begin by saying what Graves does not do. He does not make us feel that we have travelled with him to the outer limits of experience, particularly spiritual experience, which is the rare achievement of the greatest artists. His characteristic response, seen typically in 'The Terraced Valley', is to turn away from what Charles Tomlinson has called 'an extended trajectory', so that 'the constriction and attendant simplification result in a willed curtailment of Graves's powers, a splintering away of the vision into a series of brief lyric statements.' [33] It may be that his naturally stoical temperament, his refusal to expect too much from life, is partly responsible for this limitation of his poetry, but the same quality has also given much of his best work an underlying toughness of fibre. It has often prevented his self-denying and self-blaming attitude from becoming self-indulgent or self-pitying. This, for instance, is one of the strengths of 'The Terraced Valley', as of 'Sick Love', 'Pure Death' and 'The Presence'. Furthermore, it explains why, as Ronald Gaskell has said, Graves has written particularly well on

> ...the awkwardness of human relationships: the failures and betrayals of the will, the self-deceptions and misunderstandings in which we involve ourselves; the difficulty, in fact, of living with other people.[34]

One thinks of examples as varied as 'A Jealous Man', 'Never Such Love', 'Vain and Careless', and even 'Down, Wanton, Down!' in the poems before 1938, and there are numerous further instances in the later work.

These poems also serve to show the nature of Graves's success. He may not have told us much about ourselves that is new, but after reading his poems one comes away with a fuller, richer awareness of certain moments in one's own experience. Who has not known the quiet, self-confident delight felt at certain moments of parting that Graves gives lasting precision and vividness in 'A Former Attachment'? Similarly, the elegiac tone of 'Time', with its haunting conclusion, provides us with a memorable meditation on the condition of our lives:

33. Charles Tomlinson in The Penguin Guide to English Literature, Vol. 7, ed. Boris Ford (1961, rptd. 1966), p.465.
34. Gaskell, Critical Quarterly, 3, No.7 (Autumn 1961), 213-22.

Time is Time's ease and the sweet oil that coaxes
All obstinate locks and rusty hinges
To loving kindness.

And am I proof against that lovesome pair,
Old age and childhood, twins in Time,
In sorrowful vagueness,

And will I not pretend the accustomed thanks:
Humouring age with filial flowers,
Childhood with pebbles? [35]

The pebbles, symbolizing endurance, and the flowers, which represent transience, are equally the victims of time, as old age and childhood mark the extremities of time in human terms. Time, indifferent to and unaware of beauty or youth, is remorseless, but Graves, like Andrew Marvell in 'To His Coy Mistress', is not bitter, realizing the futility of such a response. Rather, he smiles wryly at the way we humour old age and childhood with tokens which are themselves symbols of transience. The tightness of the argument, aptness of the language, and restrained emotion are typical Gravesian excellences, and here he has combined them faultlessly. Although the perception is not new, one can hardly wish for it to be expressed more effectively.

Male lust is another feeling about which Graves has written well, and works such as 'Ulysses', 'Down, Wanton, Down ! ', and 'Succubus' tackle this subject in a frank, convincing way. It has been claimed by David Cecil and George Steiner that he has often evaded the most passionate moments of experience, but though this may have been a limitation in certain situations, in dealing with lust it has been a positive advantage, for Graves has conveyed the compelling, instinctive force of desire partly by the mixture of shock, horror and disgust with which he reacts to it.[36] This is nowhere seen more clearly than in the concluding stanza of 'Ulysses':

One, two and many: flesh had made him blind.
Flesh had one pleasure only in the act,
Flesh set one purpose only in the mind -
Triumph of flesh and the continuance kind
Of those same pleasures with which flesh was racked. [37]

The repetition of the word 'flesh' in every line forces us into awareness of how the body's desires can rule the mind. Lust forces the man to seek

35. TWE? (1931), p.3.
36. Lord David Cecil, The Saturday Review, 135 (2 June 1923), 726. Steiner, Kenyon Review, 22 (Summer 1960), 340-65.
37. P 1930-1933 (1933), p.3.

temporary gratification, but the animal need soon returns with all its former urgency, and again he must submit. 'Ulysses' convinces us of the power of an instinct we usually are inclined to avoid discussing.

Since the 1930's Graves has written with much more single-mindedness on the vicissitudes of love - to the extent that in 'To Juan at the Winter Solstice' he declared:

> There is one story and one story only
> That will prove worth your telling. [38]

It is largely on these later poems that his reputation as a love poet has been established. Yet from his earliest work onwards Graves was fascinated by love. Until the 'thirties, he usually wrote of frustrated or unhappy love, but in the Laura Riding period he began to employ a more celebratory tone. Although subsequently he has continued to write of the pains of love as well as its joys, his basic faith in it has never flagged.

Between 1914 and 1938, Robert Graves confronted and worked out the major problems in his life, both personal and artistic. It would be impertinent and untrue to suggest that life has been an uninterrupted calm for him since then, but it would be wrong to state that his poetry after this time has reflected private upheavals equivalent to those of the earlier period. Following the First World War, Graves started the long process of self-definition through his poetry which has continued right up to his most recent collection. But by 1938 he had arrived at beliefs and attitudes which he has not substantially changed, for, as has been argued, the White Goddess myth is a logical extension of those ideas. There has been no loss of technical skill and he has persistently helped us, in the words of Ronald Gaskell, 'to understand our own experience by the thoroughness with which he explores his own'.[39] Yet in the end one regrets that since 1938 there have not been more of the tensions and dynamic alterations of direction that characterised the early poetry. No doubt Graves has published fewer bad poems in later years, but that may be partly because he has risked less. He ended the foreword to his 1938 Collected Poems with the thought that

> my health as a poet lies in my mistrust of the comfortable point-of-rest. Certainly, this suspicious habit, this dwelling upon discomfort and terror, has brought me good luck.[40]

It would be hard to disagree with this statement, and it gains added force as one reads more recent poems.

38. CP (1975), pp.137-38.
39. Gaskell, Critical Quarterly, 3, No. 7 (Autumn 1961), 213-22.
40. CP (1938), pp.xxiv.

For all their excellence - and Graves's poems are very good - one is forced to realize that the territory which he has carved out for himself may be described, in Jane Austen's words, as 'the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory'. T.S. Eliot has defined for us the importance of 'minor' poets, and George Stade has said that Graves is 'a minor poet of major proportions'. [41] It is an apt phrase, for to read the poems of Robert Graves is to encounter evocations and explorations of certain experiences which the writer has felt and known through and through, and which he has recorded with unavoidable honesty and the impeccable skill of a master craftsman. The themes of his work may be circumscribed, but at least one recognizes through one's own experience the authenticity of the poet's reaction, for Graves has seldom been deluded into attempting too much. If this is a weakness from one aspect, from another, it has been an abiding source of strength. Laura Riding spoke of the writer as 'properly the discoverer and preserver of the world's good company', and the poems Robert Graves wrote between 1914 and 1938 provide us with an unusually complete and revealing insight into the critical years in the development of a poet whose long service to his art has assured him of the permanent right to this title.[42] It is fitting to end with words which he addressed to his beloved muse woman, and which capture exactly his typical attitude of simultaneous regret and delight towards life and its relationships: [43]

> Be warm, enjoy the season, lift your head,
> Exquisite in the pulse of tainted blood,
> That infirm passion not to be despised.
>
> Take your delight in momentariness,
> Walk between dark and dark - a shining space
> With the grave's narrowness, though not its peace.

41. Stade, Robert Graves (1967), p.1.
42. Riding, The World and Ourselves (1938), p.420.
43. P 1929 (1929), p.1.

KEY

/ = reprint

X = reprint + revision

(X) = revised reprint in introduction to Collected Poems (1938)

N.B. Collected Poems (1955) and Collected Poems (1966). were both American editions, and it has proved impossible to trace them through the Inter-Library Loans Scheme, or to find copies of them in the British Museum Library. Accordingly, it has not been feasible to establish the existence of revisions in these collections.

OVER THE BRAZIER (1916)	OB (1920)	FF	P 1914-1926	P 1914-1927	CP 38	CP 47	CP 55	PSH 57	PRG	CP 59	PF	PSH 61	CP 61	CP 65	CP 66	CP 75
"The Poet in the Nursery"	X	X	X	/												
'Star Talk"	X															
'The Dying Knight and the Fauns'	X															
'Willaree'	/															
'The Face of the Heavens'	X															
'Jolly Yellow Moon'	/															
'Youth and Folly'	/															
'Ghost Music'	/															
'Free Verse'	X	X	X	/												
'In the Wilderness'	/	X	X	/	(X)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
'Oh, and Oh! '	/															
'Cherry-Time'	/	X														
'On Finding Myself a Soldier'																
'The Shadow of Death'	X															
'A Renascence'																
'The Morning Before Battle'	X															
'Limbo'	X															
'The Trenches'	/															
'The First Funeral'	/															
'The Adventure'	/															
'I Hate the Moon'	/															
'Big Words'	X															
'The Dead Fox Hunter'	/		X	/												
'It's a Queer Time'	X															
'1915'	/	X	X	/												
'Over the Brazier'	X	X	/													

GOLIATH AND DAVID	FF	P 1914-1926	P 1914-1927	CP 38
'The Bough of Nonsense'	x	/	/	(/)
'Goliath and David'	x	x	/	
'A Pinch of Salt'			/	
'Babylon'.		x		
'Careers'		x		
'The Lady Visitor in the Pauper Ward'	x			
'The Last Post'.		x	/	/
'A Dead Boche'		x	x	/
'Escape'		x	x	/ (/)
'Not Dead'		x	/	/

FAIRIES AND FUSILIERS	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP 38	PF	SPP
'To an Ungentle Critic'					
'The Legion'	x	/	(x)		
'To Lucasta'					
'Two Fusiliers'		x	/		
'To Robert Nichols'		x	/	(x)	
'Dead Cow Farm'		x	/		
'Mr. Philosopher'					
'The Cruel Moon'					
'Finland'					
'The Caterpillar'					

FAIRIES AND FUSILIERS (Continued).	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP 38	PF	SPP
'Sorley's Weather'					
'The Cottage'					
'When I'm Killed'					
'Letter to S.S.'	X	/			
'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'	X	/			
'Marigolds'					
'Love and Black Magic'					
'Smoke-Rings'					
'A Child's Nightmare'					
'A Boy in Church'				X	
'Corporal Stare'	X	/	(X)		
'The Assault Heroic'					

THE TREASURE BOX	PG	W	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP 38	CP 47	CP 55	PSH 57	PRG	CP 59	PF 60	PSH 61	MP 61	SPP	CP 61	MDWI	CP 65	PSH 66	CP 66	PAL	PSH 72	CP 75
'Morning Phoenix'	/															X	/		/			/
'Catherine Drury'	X																					
'The Treasure Box'	X																					
'The Kiss'	/				(X)								/		/		/		/	/		/
'Lost Love'	X		X	/	X	/	/	/	/	/		/		X	/		/	/	/	X	/	/
'Fox's Dingle'	X																					
'The Dream'		X	X	/	X	/	/	X	/	/	/	/			/		X	/	/		/	/
'The Fiddler'		X	X	/	X	X	/	/	/	/	X	/			/		/		/			/
'The Gifts'		X	X	/	X	X	/	/	/	/	X	/			/		/		/			/
'Mirror, Mirror'		X	/	/																		

COUNTRY SENTIMENT	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP 38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH 61	SPP	CP 61	CP 65	PSH 66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP 75
'A Frosty Night'	/	/	X		/	/	/	/	/		/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'A Song for Two Children'	X	/																	
'Dicky'	X	/								X									
'The Three Drinkers'																			
'The Boy Out of Church'																			
'After the Play'										X									
'Song: One Hard Look'	X	/	X		/	/	X	/	/	/	/		/	X	/	/	/	/	/
'True Johnny'	X	/																	
'The Voice of Beauty Drowned'																			
'The God Called Poetry'																			
'Rocky Acres'	X	/			X	/	X	/	/		/	X	/	X	/	/		X	/
'Advice to Lovers'																			

COUNTRY SENTIMENT (Continued)

	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH 61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Nebuchadnezzar's Fall'																			
'Give Us Rain'																			
'Allie'	/	/	x		x	/	/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/	/		/	/
'Loving Henry'	x	/	(x)																
'Brittle Bones'	x	/																	
'Apples and Water'	x	/	x	/	x	/	/	/	/		/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Manticor in Arabia'																			
'Outlaws'	x	/	x		x	/	x	x	/		/	/	/	/	/	/		/	/
'Baloo Loo for Jenny'																			
'Hawk and Buckle'																			
'The Alice Jean'										x		x							
'The Cupboard'	/	/																	
'The Beacon'	x	/																	
'Pot and Kettle'	x	/	(x)																
'Ghost Raddled'	x	/	x	x	x	/	x	/	x		x	x	/	x	/	/		/	/
'Neglectful Edward'	x	/																	
'The Well-Dressed Children'																			
'Thunder at Night'	x	/																	
'To E.M. - Ballad of a Nursery Rhyme'.	x	/																	
'Jane'																			
'Vain and Careless'	/	/	x	/	/	/	x	/	/	x	/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Nine O'Clock'																			
'The Picture Book'																			
'The Promised Lullaby'																			
'Haunted'																			

COUNTRY SENTIMENT (Continued)

	P1914-26	P1914-27	CP38	PMG	CP47	CP55	PSH 57	PRG	CP 59	PF	PSH 61	SPP	CP 61	CP 65	PSH 66	CP 66	PAL	PSH 72	CP 75
'Retrospect: The Jests of the Clock'												X							
'Here They Lie'																			
'Tom Taylor'																			
'Country at War'																			
'Sospan Fach'																			
'The Leveller'	X	/																	
'Hate Not, Fear Not'																			
'A Rhyme of Friends'																			
'A First Review.																			

THE PIER GLASS

	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP38	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH 61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'The Stake'	X	/																
'The Troll's Nosegay'	X	/		X	/	X	/	X		/		/	/	/	/	/	/	/
'The Pier-Glass'	X	/	X	X	/	X	/	/		/	/	/	/	/	/		X	/
'The Finding of Love'	X	/	X	X	/	/	/	X		/		/	/	/	/	/	/	/
'Reproach'		/	/	X	X	/	X	/	/		/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'The Magical Picture'									X										
'Distant Smoke'																			
'Raising the Stone'																			
'The Gnat'	X	/																	
'The Patchwork Bonnet'																			
'Kit Logan and Lady Helen'																			

THE PIER-GLASS (Continued)

	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP38	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Down'	x	/	x	x	/	x	x	x		x		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Saul of Tarsus'																		
'Storm: At the Farm Window'																		
'Black Horse Lane'		/	/															
'Return'	x	/	x	x	/	/	/	x		x		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Incubus'	x	/																
'The Hills of May'	x	/	x	x	/	x	/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/	/	/	/
'The Coronation Murder'	x	/										x	x		/			/

WHIPPERGINNY

	P1914-26	P1914-27	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	AHH	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Whipperginny'																					
'The Bed-Post'	x	/	x		/	/	/	x	/	/	/		/								
'A Lover Since Childhood'	x	/	(/)																		
'Song of Contrariety'	/	/			x	/	x	/	/		/		/			/	/	/	/	/	/
'The Ridge-Top'	x	/	x	/	/	/	/	/	/		/	/	/			/	/	/	/	/	/
'Song in Winter'																					
'Unicorn and the White Doe'	x	/	x		x			/	/			/								/	/
'Sullen Moods'	x	/												x						x	x
'A False Report'			x	/	/	/	/	/	/		/		/			/	/	/		/	/
'Children of Darkness'	x	/	x		x	/		/	/			/				x		/			/
'Richard Roe and John Doe'	x	/	x		/	/		/	/			/				/		/			/
'The Dilaecticians'	/	/												x							
'The Lands of Whipperginny'	/	/	x		x	/	x	x	/		/		/			x	/	/		/	/
'The General Elliott'	x	/	x		x	/	/	x	/	/	/	x	/								
'A Fight to the Death'	/	/																			

WHIPPERGINNY (Cont)

	P1914-26	P1914-1927	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	AHH	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Old Wives' Tales'	X	X	X		X	/	X	/	X		/		/								
'Christmas Eve'	X	/																			
'The Snake and the Bull'	X	X																			
'The Red Ribbon Dream'																					
'In Procession'	/	/	X	/	X	/	X	X	/		/		/			/	/	/		/	/
'An English Wood'	X	/	X		/	/	/	/	/		/	/	/								
'Interlude'																					
'Epitaph on an Unfortunate Artist'														/							
'A Historyof Peace'	/	/										/									
'The Rock Below'																					
'An Idyll of Old Age'	X	/																			
'The Lord Chamberlain Tells of a Famous Meeting'.	X	/																			
'The Sewing Basket'	X	/												X							
'Against Clock and Compasses'																					
'The Avengers'	X	/																			
'On the Poet's Birth'	X	/																			
'The Technique of Perfection'																					
'The Sibyl'																					
'A Crusader'	X	/																			
'A New Portrait of Judith of Bethulia'																					

WHIPPERGINNY (Cont.)	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	AHH	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'A Reversal'																					
'The Martyred Decadents'																					
'On Christopher Marlowe'																					
'A Village Conflict'												/		X							
'Dedicatory'																					
'To My Collateral Ancestor'																					
'A Vehicle, to wit, a bicycle'																					
'Motto to a Book of Emblems'																					
'The Bowland Rim'	X	/																			
'A Forced Music'	X	/																			
'The Turn of a Page'	X	/																			
'The Manifestation, in the Temple'																					
'To Any Saint'																					
'A Dewdrop'																					
'A Valentine'	X	/																			

THE FEATHER BED	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP38	CP47	CP55	PRG	CP59	CP61
'Prologue'	X	X	X	/	/	X	X	/
'The Feather Bed'								
'Epilogue'	X	X						

MOCK BEGGAR HALL	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	AHH	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Diplomatic Relations'	X	/									X		X	X						
'Hemlock'	X	/																		
'Full Moon'	X	/	X	X	/	/	/	/	X	/		/			/	/	/	/	/	/
'Myrrhina'	X	/																		
'Twin Souls'	X	/																		
'The North Window'	X	/																		
'Attercop: the All-Wise Spider'	X	/																		
'Antinomies'																				
'Northwards from Oxford'																				
'Witches'	X	/																		
'Antigonus: an Eclogue'																				
'Essay on Continuity'	X	/																		
'Interchange of Selves'																				
'Knowledge of God'	/	/	(X)																	
'Mock Beggar Hall'																				
'The Rainbow and the Sceptic'	X	/																		

WELCHMAN's HOSE	P1914-26	P1914-27	CP38	NMG	CP47	PS	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Alice'	X	/	X		X		/	X	/	/		/		X		X	/	/		/	/
'Burrs and Brambles'	X	/																			
'From Our Ghostly Enemy'	X	/																			
'The Figure Head'	X	/	(X)												X						
'Ovid in Defeat'	/	/																			
'To an Editor'	X	/																			

WELCHMAN's HOSE (Continued).	P1914-1926	P1914-1927	CP38	NMG	CP47	PS	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'The Kingfisher's Return'																					
'Love Without Hope'	X	/	X		/		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/		/	/	/	/	/	/
'The Traveller's Curse after Misdirection'	X	/				X	/		/	/			/	/							
'Tilly Kettle'																					
'The College Debate'	X	/																			
'Sergeant-Major Money'						X	/		/	/				/							
'A Letter from Wales'	X	/																			
'The Presence'	X	/	X	/	X		/	/	/	/		/		/		/	/	/		/	/
'The Clipped Stater'	X	/													X						
'The Poetic State'	X	/																			
'Essay on Knowledge'	X	/	X	/	X		/	X	/	/		/	/	/		/	X	/	/	/	/
'At the Games'																					

THE MARMOSITE'S MISCELLANY	P1914-1926	P1914-1927
'To M. in India'	X	/
'The Marmosite's Miscellany'	X	X
'The Moment of Weakness'	X	/

POEMS 1914-1926.

	P1914-1927	CP38	NMS	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	MP	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'The Country Dance'	/	X			/	X	/	/		/		/							
'The Rose and the Lily'	/																		
'An Occasion'	/																		
'A Dedication of Three Hats'	/(/)																		
'Ancestors'	/	X		/	/	/	/	/		X		/		/	/	/		/	/
'The Corner Knot'	/												X						
'Virgil the Sorcerer'	X	(/)											X						
'Pygmalion To Galatea'	/	X											X						
'A Letter To a Friend'	/																		
'This is Noon'	/								X			/							
'The Time of Day'	/																		
'Blonde or Dark?'	/	/																	
'Boots and Bed'	/																		
'The Taint'	/																		
'Dumplings' Address To The Gourmets'	/																		
'Sorrow'	/																		
'The Nape of the Neck'	/																		
'A Visit to Stratford'.	/																		
'Pure Death'	/	X	/	/	/	X	/	/		/		/		/	/	/	/	/	/
'The Cool Web'.	/	X	/	X	/	/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/

POEMS 1914-1927.	P1926-1930	CP38	NMG	CP47	PS	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PSH72	CP75
'The Progress'					X	/		/	/			/		/		/		/
'Hell'	X	X		/		/	X	/	/	/		/		/	/	/	/	/
'The Dead Ship'	X	X	/	/		/	/	/	/	X		/		/	/	/	/	/
'O Jorrocks, I Have Promised'																		
'The Lost Acres'	X	X		X		/	X	/	/	/	/	/		X	/	/	X	/
'The Awkward Gardener'	X	X		/		/	X	X	X	/	/	/		/	X	/	/	/
'To A Charge of Didacticism'																		
'The Philatelist Royal'.	X												X					
'To Be Less Philosophical'	X	X											X					

POEMS 1929	P1926-1930	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Between Dark and Dark'	X	X	/	X	/	/	/	/		/		/	/	/	/	X		/
'In No Direction'	X	X		/	/	/	/	/		/	X	/	/	X	/		/	/
'In Broken Images'	X	X		/	/	/	/	/		/		/	/	/	/		X	/
'To The Galleys'	X	X		/	/	X	X	/		/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Warning to Children'	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	X	/	/	/	X	/	/	/		/	/
'A Dismissal'	X																	
'Guessing Black or White'	X																	
'Hector'	/																	
'Against Kind'	X																	
'Midway'	X	X		X	/		X	X				/						
'Green Cabbage Wit'	X																	
'Castle'	/	X	/	/		X	/	/		/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Railway Carriage'	/	X		/	/	X	X	X		/	/	/	/	/	/		/	/

POEMS 1929 (Continued)	P1926-1930	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Back Door'																		
'Front Door'	X	X		/	/		/	X				/	X	/				/
The Tow-Path'	X																	
'Repair Shop'	X	X		/	/		/	/				/						
'Landscape'	/	X	/	/	/	X	X	/		/	/	/	/	/	/		/	/
'Sandhills'	/	X	/	/	/	X	/	/		/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Pavement'	X	X		/	/	X	/	/		/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Quayside'	/	X		/	/	/	/	/		/		/	X	/	/		/	/
'Return Fare'	X																	
'Single Fare'	X	X		/	/		/	/				/	/		/			/
'It Was All Very Tidy'	X	X		/	/	/	/	/		/		X	/	/	/		/	X
'A Sheet of Paper'																		

TEN POEMS MORE	P1926-30	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'To The Reader Over My Shoulder'	X	X		/	/	/	/	X		X		/	/	/	/		/	/
'History of the Word'		/	X		/	/		/	X			/						
'Interruption'		/	X		/	/		/	/			/	X		/			/
'Survival of Love'																		
'The Age of Certainty'		/	X		X	/		/	X				/	/		/		/
'The Beast'		X	X		X	/		/	X									
'Cracking the Nut against the Hammer'		X																
'The Terraced Valley'		X	X	X	X	/	X	X	/		/		/	/	/	/	X	X /

TEN POEMS MORE (Continued)	P1926-30	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PF	PSH61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Oak, Poplar, Pine'																		
'Act V., Scene 5'		X	X		X	/		X	X			/	X					
'Tail-Piece: A Song to Make You and Me Laugh'		X	X		X		/	/	/	X	X		/	X	/	/		/ /

POEMS 1926-1930	CP38	NMG	CP47	PS	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PSH61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PSH72	CP75
'Brother'				X	/		/	/		/	/	/		/		/
'Bay of Naples'																
'Flying Crooked'	X	/	/		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
'Reassurance to the Satyr'																
'Synthetic Such'	X		X		/	X	/	/	/		/	/	/	/	/	/
'Dragons'																
'The Next Time'	X		/		/		/	/		/	/	/		/		/

TO WHOM ELSE	P1930-33	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Largesse to the Poor'	X	X		/														
'The Felloe'd Year'	X																	
'On Time'	X	X	/	/	/	X	X	/	/	/	/		/	X	/		/	/
'On Rising Early'	X	X		X	/	X	/	/	/		/		/	/	/		/	/
'On Dwelling'	X	/	/	/	/	X	/	/	/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/
'On Necessity'	/																	
'The Foolish Senses'	X	X																
'Devilishly Disturbed'	/											X						
'The Legs'	X	X	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/		/	/	/		/	/

TO WHOM ELSE? (Continued)	P1930-33	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	CP59	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Ogres and Pygmies'	X	X	/	/	/	/	/	/	X		/		/	/	/		/	/
'To Whom Else?'	X	/																
'As It Were Poems'	X																	
'On Portents'	X	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/		/		/	/	/	/	/	/

POEMS 1930-1933	CP38	NMG	CP47	CP55	PSH57	PRG	S	CP59	FC	PSH61	SPP	CP61	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'The Bards'	X	X	X	/	X	/		/		/		/	/	/	/		/	/
'Ulysses'	X	/	X	/	/	X		/		X		/	/	/	/	X	X	/
'Down, Wanton, Down!'	X	/	/	/	/	/		/		X		/	/	/	/	X	X	/
'The Cell'	X		/	/	X	/		/		/		/	X	/	/		/	/
'The Succubus'	X		X	/	X	/		/		/		/	/		/	/		/
'Nobody'	X		X	/	/	/		/		/	/	/	X	/	/		/	/
'Danegeld'																		
'Trudge Body'	X		/				X		/			/	/		/			/
'Music At Night'																		
'Without Pause'	X		X															
'The Clock Men'	X		X															
'The Commons of Sleep'																		
'What Times are These ?'																		

COLLECTED POEMS (1938).

	NMG	CP47	P53	CP55	PSH57	PRG	SPinH	S	CP59	FC	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	NP	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'Wanderings of Christmas'								X	/	/		/				X			/	/	/
'Certain Mercies'	/	X		/	X	/			/	/		/				/		/			/
'The Cuirassiers of the Frontier'	/	/		/	/	/			/	/		/				/	/	/		/	/
'Callow Captain'	/	/		/		/			/			/									
'The Stranger'																					
'The Smoky House'																					
'Green Loving'		/												X	/	X	/		/		/
'The Goblet'																					
'Fiend, Dragon, Mermaid'																					
'Fragment of a Lost Poem'	/			/	/	/			/		/		/			/	/	/		/	/
'Galatea and Pygmalion'		X		/		X			/				/								
'The Devil's Advice To Story-Tellers'.	/	/		/	/	/			/		/		/			/	/	/		/	/
'Lunch-Hour Blues'																					
'Hotel Bed'							X	/	/				/								
'Progressive Housing'																					
'Leda'		/		/		/			/				/			/		/			/
'The Florist Rose'	/	/		/	/	/			/		/		/			/		/			/
'Being Tall'																					
'At First Sight'		X		/	/	/			/		/	/	/			/	/	/	/	/	/
'Recalling War'	/	X		/	X	/			/		/		/								
'X'																					
'Parent to Children'		X		/	/	/					/										

COLLECTED POEMS (1938) Continued.

	NMG	CP47	P53	CP55	PSH57	PRG	SPInH	S	CP59	FC	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	NP	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'To Challenge Delight'		/		/	X	X			/		/		/			X	/	/		/	/
'To Walk on Hills'		/		/	X	X			/		/		/			X	/	/		/	/
'To Bring the Dead To Life'	/	X		/	X	X			X		/	/	/			/	/	/		X	/
'To Evoke Posterity'		/		/	X	/			/		/	/	/			/	/	/		/	/
'The Poets'	/	/		/	X	/			X		/	/	/			/	/	/		/	/
'Defeat of the Rebels'		/	X	/	/	/			/		/		/								
'The Grudge'																					
'Never Such Love'	/	/		/	X	/			/		/		/			/	/	X	/	/	/
'The Halfpenny'																					
'The Fallen Signpost'		X		/		/			/				/								
'The China Plate'		/		/	X	/			X		/	/	/								
'Idle Hands'																					
'The Laureate'	/	/		/	/	/			/		/	/	/			/	/	/		/	/
'A Jealous Man'	/	/		/	/	/			/		X		/			/	/	/	X	/	/
'The Cloak'	/	/		/	/	/			X		/	X	/			/	/	/		/	/
'The Halls of Bedlam'		/		/	/	/			/		X		/			/	/	/		/	/
'Or To Perish Before Day'		/		/		/			/				/			/		/			/
'A Country Mansion'		/		/	X	/			/		/		/			/	/	/		X	/
'The Eremites'		/		/		/															
'The Advocates'	/	/		/	X	/			/		X		/			/	/	/		/	/
'Self-Praise'		X		/		/															
'The Challenge'		X		/		X															

COLLECTED POEMS (1938) Continued...

	NMG	CP47	P53	CP55	PSH57	PRG	SPImP	S	CP59	FC	PSH61	SPP	CP61	MDC	NP	CP65	PSH66	CP66	PAL	PSH72	CP75
'To The Sovereign Muse'		X																			
'The Ages of Oath'		X		/	/	/			/		/		/			/	/	/		/	/
'Like Snow'	/	/		/	/	/			/		/		/			/	/	/	/	/	/
'The Climate of Thought'		/		/		/			X				/			/		/			/
'End of Play'	X	/		/	/	/			/		/		/			/	/	/	/	/	/
'The Fallen Tower of Siloam'		/	X		/	/	/		/		/		/			/	/	/		/	/
'The Great-Grandmother'	/	/		/	/	/			/		/	X	/			/	/	/		X	/
'No More Ghosts'	/	/		/	X	/			/		/		/			/	/	/		/	/
'Leaving the Rest Unsaid'			X	/	X	/			/		/		/			/	/	/		/	/

Notes to Appendix One.

In his Collected Poems (1975) Graves brings together a total of 629 works Of these, some 109 are poems, or revisions of poems, originally published in the 1914-1938 period. Thus the first twenty-four years of Graves's career as a published poet account for little more than one-sixth of his latest collected works. This fact must be qualified, however, by noting that since the Collected Poems (1965) and the 1975 edition Graves has added 291 new poems. On the basis of this unprecedented number of additions to the latest collected works we are led to conclude that the poet himself is more satisfied - or less dissatisfied - with his output of the last decade than with that of any other equivalent interval in the past.

The 109 poems surviving from the 1914-1938 period represent only about one-quarter of the poetry published by Graves during those years. Certain conclusions are suggested by the following list summarizing the original volumes in which the surviving poems first appeared, and showing the total number of poems published for the first time in each collection.

Collection.	Title of Surviving Poem.	Total of New Poems in Volume.
OB (1916)	'In the Wilderness'	26
GD	-	10
FF	-	31
TB	'Song: A Phoenix Flame' (formerly 'Morning Phoenix')	10
	'Fragment' (formerly 'The Kiss')	
	'Lost Love'	
	'What Did I Dream?' (formerly 'The Dream')	
	'Henry and Mary' (formerly two poems, 'The Fiddler' and 'The Gifts').	
CS	'A Frosty Night'	46
	'One Hard Look' (formerly 'Song: One Hard Look')	
	'Rocky Acres'	

Collection.	Title of Poem.	Total of New Poem in Volume.
CS (cont'd.)		
	'Allie'	
	'Apples and Water'	
	'Outlaws'	
	'The Haunted House' (formerly 'Ghost-Raddled')	
	'Vain and Careless'	
PG	'The Troll's Nosegay'	19
	'The Pier-Glass'	
	'The Finding of Love'	
	'Reproach'	
	'Down'	
	'Return'	
	'The Hills of May'	
	'The Coronation Murder'	
W	'Song of Contrariety'	51
	'Love in Barrenness' (formerly 'The Ridge-Top')	
	'Song: Sullen Moods' (formerly 'Sullen Moods')	
	'Angy Samson' (formerly 'A False 'Report')	
	'Children of Darkness'	
	'Richard Roe and John Doe'	
	'The Lands of Whipperginny'	
	'In Procession'	
FB	-	1
MBH	'Full Moon'	16
WH	'Alice'	18
	'Love Without Hope'	
	'The Presence'	
	'Vanity' (formerly 'Essay on Knowledge')	
MM	-	3

Collection.	Title of Poem	Total of New Poems in Volume.
P 1914-192 6	'Ancestors'	20
	'Pure Death'	
	'The Cool Web'	
P 1914-1927	'The Progress'	9
	'Hell'	
	'The Furious Voyage' (formerly 'The Dead Ship')	
	'Lost Acres'	
	'Gardener' (formerly 'The Awkward Gardener')	
P 1929	'Sick Love' (formerly 'Between Dark and Dark')	25
	'In No Direction'	
	'In Broken Images'	
	'Thief' (formerly 'To the Galleys')	
	'Warning to Children'	
	'The Castle' (formerly 'Castle')	
	'Welsh Incident' (formerly 'Railway Carriage')	
	'Front Door'	
	'Nature's Lineaments' (formerly 'Landscape')	
	'Sea Side' (formerly 'Sandhills')	
	'Wm. Brazier' (formerly 'Pavement')	
	'A Former Attachment' (formerly 'Quayside')	
	'Single Fare'	
	'It Was All Very Tidy'	
TPM	'The Reader Over My Shoulder' (formerly 'To the Reader Over My Shoulder')	11
	'Interruption'	
	'New Legends (formerly 'The Age of Certainty')	
	'The Terraced Valley'	
	'Song: Lift-Boy' (formerly 'Tail-Piece: A Song to Make you and Me Laugh')	

Collection.	Title of Poem.	Total of New Poems in Volume.
P 1926-1930	'Brother'	7
	'Flying Crooked'	
	'Synthetic Such'	
	'The Next Time'	
TWE?	'Time' (formerly 'On Time')	13
	'On Rising Early'	
	'On Dwelling'	
	'The Legs'	
	'Ogres and Pygmies'	
	'On Portents'	
P 1930-1933	'The Bards'	13
	'Ulysses'	
	'Down, Wanton, Down ! '	
	'The Philosopher' (formerly 'The Cell')	
	'The Succubus'	
	'Nobody'	
	'Trudge, Body ! '	
CP 38	'The Christmas Robin' (formerly 'Wanderings of Christmas')	53
	'Certain Mercies'	
	'The Cuirassiers of the Frontier'	
	'Fragment of a Lost Poem'	
	'Variables of Green' (formerly 'Green Loving')	
	'The Devil's Advice to Story-Tellers'	
	'Leda'	
	'The Florist Rose'	
	'At First Sight'	
	'To Walk on Hills'	
	'To Bring the Dead to Life'	
	'To Evoke Posterity'	
	'Any Honest Housewife' (formerly 'The Poets')	
	'Never Such Love'	
	'The Laureate'	

Collection.	Title of Poem.	Total of New Poems in Volume.
CP38 (cont'd).	'A Jealous Man'	
	'The Cloak'	
	'The Halls of Bedlam'	
	'Or To Perish Before Day'	
	'A Country Mansion'	
	'Advocates' (formerly 'The Advocates')	
	'The Ages of Oath'	
	'Like Snow'	
	'The Climate of Thought'	
	'End of Play'	
	'The Fallen Tower of Siloam'	
	'The Great-Grandmother'	
	'No More Ghosts'	
	'Leaving the Rest Unsaid'	

This list demonstrates that Graves has preserved none of his poems dealing with the First World War. The Treasure Box, from which six of the ten poems first printed there survive, contains no poems referring directly to the war. Furthermore, apart from The Pier-Glass - where eight of the nineteen poems first published there are still in circulation - the volumes of the early 'twenties are not extensively represented in the 1975 collection.

It is not until the period of Graves's collaboration with Laura Riding that we find larger numbers of poems surviving from each collection. 70 of the 109 poems retained from the 1914-1938 period in the Collected Poems (1975) were first published between 1927 and 1938. This in itself is important statistical evidence of the significance the poet attaches to his work of these years. It also implies that in selecting his Collected Poems (1975) Graves has found less he disagrees with in the work of 1927-1938 than in his published verse of the thirteen

preceding years. This observation should be added to the evidence presented in the main body of the thesis in support of the idea that Graves formulated many of his seminal theories and beliefs, as well as developing his practical skills, in the Laura Riding years. Certainly both the themes and the style of the surviving poems appear as natural forerunners of the later works.

A further point is worth making. Graves himself has perhaps encouraged belief in the extent to which he has revised his work. For instance, in Goodbye To All That, he wrote:

> My poetry-writing has always been a painful process of continual corrections and corrections on top of corrections and persistent dissatisfaction. I have never written a poem in less than three drafts; the greatest number I recall is thirty-five ('The Troll's Nosegay'). [1]

More recently, in The Poet's Calling, Robin Skelton includes copies of sixteen drafts of one of Graves's later poems, 'A Bracelet'. [2] However, although Graves may devote enormous energy to a poem before it appears in print, it became indisputably obvious from the work done to compile the checklist of revisions made to poems published between 1914 and 1938 that in the vast majority of cases he has made only minor changes to work after its initial appearance. Many of his revisions amount to very slight variations in punctuation, the replacement of occasional words, or an alteration in the title. It is only a small minority of poems that have been totally, or even largely, re-worked.

One may conclude that in general Graves's practice has been to drop poems with which he no longer agrees for one reason or another rather than to try and revise them. This, of course, has added to the effect of unity and continuity he achieves in his Collected Poems. It is also significant again that he has rejected more poems from the years before he met Laura Riding, and before his ideas on poetry and love had evolved in the way suggested in Chapter One above, than from any succeeding period.

1. Graves, GBTAA (1929), pp. 388-89

2. Robin Skelton, The Poet's Calling (1975), pp. 84-89.

Appendix Two.

The following errors have been traced in F. H. Higginson's book, A Bibliography of the Works of Robert Graves.

1. The list of contents of Over the Brazier (A1, p.14 of Higginson) omits reference to 'Star - Talk', an error which is perpetuated in the second edition.
2. The list of contents of The Treasure Box (A4, pp. 17-8 of Higginson) speaks of 'Catherine Henry' instead of 'Catherine Drury'. It also omits reference to the title poem, 'The Treasure Box'.
3. The list of contents of Poems 1914-1926 (A23, p. 37 of Higginson) prints the title of the first poem in section two of the collection as '1919', whereas it should be '1915'.
   It also omits reference to the first two poems of section three which are 'Rocky Acres' and 'Outlaws'.
   These errors are perpetuated in Poems 1914-1927 (A24, p. 39 of Higginson).
4. The list of contents of Poems 1929 (A33, p. 52 of Higginson) omits reference to 'Quayside'.
5. The list of contents of To Whom Else? (A37, p. 56 of Higginson) prints the title of one poem as 'Of Necessity'. It should read 'On Necessity'.
6. The volume, Ann at Highwood Hall, (A110, pp. 171-72 of Higginson) is incorrectly dated 1946 rather than 1964. The correct date of publication is included later in the description of the book.
7. 'The Age of Certainty' (Higginson, p. 300) should be cross-referenced with 'New Legends' (Higginson, p. 316).
8. The index reference to 'Allie' (Higginson, p. 300) includes no mention of its inclusion in The Augustan Books of Modern Poetry: Robert Graves (A17), although it is listed in the contents of that volume (Higginson, p. 31).

9. 'Boots and Bed' (Higginson, p. 302) is published in A23 and A24. This is not mentioned.
10. 'Brother' (Higginson, p 303) is not listed as appearing in A67, which it does. It should also be listed as appearing in A87.
11. 'Callow Captain' is not listed as appearing in A50, which it does.
12. 'The Cell' (Higginson, p. 303) should be cross-referenced with 'The Philosopher' (Higginson, p. 319).
13. 'The Awkward Gardener' (Higginson, p. 301) is first published in A24, not, as stated, in A23.
14. 'The Clipped Stater' (Higginson, p. 304) should be listed as appearing in A24.
15. 'Cracking the Nut Against the Hammer' (Higginson, p. 305) should be cross-referenced with 'Tap Room' (Higginson, p. 324).
16. 'The Dead Ship' (Higginson, p. 305), 'Ship Master' (Higginson, p. 322) and 'The Furious Voyage' (Higginson, p. 309) should all be cross-referenced.
17. 'The Devil's Advice to Story-Tellers' (Higginson, p. 306) should be listed as appearing in A50.
18. 'Essay on Knowledge' (Higginson, p. 307) and 'Vanity' (Higginson, p. 326) should be cross-referenced.
19. 'Fiend, Dragon, Mermaid' (Higginson, p. 308) and 'Mermaid, Dragon, Fiend' (Higginson, p. 315) are incorrectly cross-referenced. They are two separate poems.
20. 'The Figure-Head' (Higginson, p. 308) is not published in A8, as stated, but appears in A16.
21. 'The Forbidden Play' (Higginson, p. 308) and 'After the Play' (Higginson, p. 300) should be cross-referenced.
22. 'Green Cabbage Wit' (Higginson, p. 310) and 'Cabbage Patch' (Higginson, p. 303) should be cross-referenced.
23. 'Interruption' (Higginson, p. 312) should be recorded as appearing in A36.
24. 'The Legion' (Higginson, p. 313) was also published in A3. The A48 reference should be (A48), because only part of the poem is cited in the Foreword to that volume.

25. 'A Letter to S.S. from Mametz Wood' (Higginson, p.314) should be cross-referenced with 'A Familiar Letter to Siegfried Sassoon' (Higginson, p.308).

26. 'Like Snow' should be recorded as appearing in A50 (Higginson, p.314). It should also be listed as appearing in A83.

27. 'Mirror, Mirror' (Higginson, p.315) is incorrectly listed as appearing in A92.

28. 'Morning Phoenix' (Higginson, p.316) should be cross-referenced with 'Song: A Phoenix Flame' (Higginson, p.323).

29. 'Myrrhina' (Higginson, p.316) appears only in A10, A23 and A24. It is a completely different poem, though bearing the same title, which appears in A107, A114 and in Collected Poems (1975). Higginson does not make this distinction.

30. 'Nebuchadnezzar's Feast' (Higginson, p.316) should be listed as 'Nebuchadnezzar's Fall'.

31. 'New Legends' (Higginson, p.316) is incorrectly listed as appearing in A83.

32. 'The Progress' (Higginson, p.320) should be listed as appearing in A67.

33. 'Rocky Acres' (Higginson, p.321) should be listed as appearing in A83.

34. 'Richard Roe and John Doe' (Higginson, p.321) is incorrectly listed as appearing in A83. It does, however, appear in A60, which Higginson does not indicate on p.321.

35. 'Sergeant-Major Money' (Higginson, p.322) should be listed as appearing in A67.

36. The index cross-references 'Sick Love' (Higginson, p.322) with 'O Love in Me' (Higginson, p.317), but not with 'Between Dark and Dark' (Higginson, p.302). 'Between Dark and Dark' is cross-referenced with 'Sick Love', but not with 'O Love in Me'. 'O Love in Me' is cross-referenced with 'Sick Love', but not with 'Between Dark and Dark'. All three ought to be cross-referenced with each other.

37. 'Song: Lift-Boy' (Higginson, p.323) should be listed as appearing in A48.

38. 'The Terraced Valley' (Higginson, p.324) should be listed as appearing in A83.

39. 'To Bring the Dead to Life' (Higginson, p.325) should be listed as appearing in A50.

40. 'To E.M. - A Ballad of a Nursery Rhyme'. (Higginson, p.325) should be cross-referenced with 'Wild Strawberries' (Higginson, p.327). 'Wild Strawberries' is a revised version of 'To E.M. - A Ballad of a Nursery Rhyme'.

41. 'The Tow-Path' (Higginson, p.325) should be cross-referenced with 'Anagrammagic' (Higginson, p.300).

42. 'The Traveller's Curse after Misdirection' (Higginson, p.325) should be listed as appearing in A67.

43. 'The Poets' (A48) is not indexed at all, although it appears in the contents for that volume (Higginson, p.78-9). It should also be cross-referenced with 'Any Honest Housewife' (Higginson, p.301).

44. 'Certain Mercies' (Higginson, p.303), is dropped from the third and fourth editions (1966 and 1972) of A83.

45. 'The China Plate' (Higginson, p.303) is dropped from the third and fourth editions (1966 and 1972) of A83.

46. 'Defeat of the Rebels' (Higginson, p.306) is dropped from the third and fourth editions (1966 and 1972) of A83.

47. 'The Florist Rose' (Higginson, p.308) is dropped from the third and fourth editions (1966 and 1972) of A83.

48. 'Parent to Children' (Higginson, p.318) is dropped from the third and fourth editions (1966 and 1972) of A83.

49. 'Recalling War' (Higginson, p.320) is dropped from the third and fourth editions (1966 and 1972) of A83.

50. 'Sick Love' (Higginson, p.322) is dropped from the fourth edition (1972) of A83.

51. 'The Succubus' (Higginson, p.324) is dropped from the third and fourth editions (1966 and 1972) of A83.

The following error was traced in The Poetry of Robert Graves by Michael Kirkham.

52. On p.56 Kirkham speaks of 'The Kiss' appearing in a revised form using only the first stanza of the original in New Poems 1962. It does not appear in this volume, but in More Poems 1961.

*

Additional Notes: Chapter One.

38. The verses read as follows:

34 And David said unto Saul, thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock:

35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he rose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

36 Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.

37 David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.

* Additional Notes: Chapter Two.

140. In OB (1920 rpt.), p.8., these lines were altered to:

> But the crimson life-blood oozes
> And make roses of the daisies,
> Persian carpets of the mosses.

'Make' must be a misprint for 'makes', while the original spelling error in 'daisies' has been corrected. 'Persian carpets' has richer associations than 'Purple carpets', and adds to the romantic atmosphere of the poem.

* Additional Notes: Chapter Two

152. Cohen, Robert Graves (1960), p.11.

153. Riding and Graves, A Pamphlet Against Anthologies (1928), p.92.

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