

When Robert Graves arrived in Mallorca in 1929 he was searching for a haven

in which to reconstruct his life. At the age of thirty-four he had said goodbye to everything that came between him and his poetic vocation, and his self imposed exile from England was a last gesture of bitter triumph, the irrefutable proof of the sincerity with which he had written his autobiography *Goodbye To All That*. He was leaving behind him a childhood that had been oppressed by the rigidity and hypocrisy of Victorian society; the inconceivable horror of trench warfare with its emotional and psychological aftermaths; a broken marriage and—much to his sorrow—four small children. His most urgent need at that moment of his life was to wrench himself from a number of adverse circumstances in order to save his poetic integrity, however high the cost.

*It was a virtue not to stay,
to go my headstrong and heroic way
Seeking her out at the volcano's head,
Among pack ice, or where the track had faded
Beyond the cavern of seven sleepers:
Whose broad high brow was white as any leper's,
Whose eyes were blue, with rowan-berry lips,
With hair curled honey-coloured to white hips.*

From *In Dedication*

Secondary in importance was where to settle. The fact that his new home was situated in one of the most beautiful spots in the Mediterranean must have seemed to him at the time an unexpected bonus, and perhaps he would have been equally content with lesser scenic beauty. That, at least, is what I supposed, seeing the little attention my father seemed to pay to the glorious sunsets, the bright sparkling nights, or the soft silvery leaves of the ancient olive trees.

For in that village on the rugged northwest coast of Mallorca, where my brothers and I, the children of his second marriage, were lucky enough to grow up, my father worked untiringly in his study, emerging only to do a little gardening or to rush down to the cove for a quick swim. He seemed indifferent to his geographic surroundings, and although it is true that every now and then olive and palm trees made their appearance in his poetry, there are few direct allusions to the Mallorcan countryside in his vast poetic work.

However, when a few months before his death in 1985 I visited the Welsh village of Harlech, where the Graves family spent their holidays at the beginning of the century—father, mother and ten children, of which my father was the eighth—I suddenly understood the meaning of his apparent indifference to the outside world, and also realised that his choice of Deya, where he lived for 50 years, had not been as arbitrary and accidental as I had always imagined. Curiously, both places had a great deal in common, barring the obvious differences in vegetation and climate: craggy wild mountains dropping to sea level, low stone walls like mosaic, huge sheep grazing freely.



August 12 81
Mid-day
Tempered

LUCIA GRAVES

*The Poetic Landscape of
Robert Graves*

