

**ON ENGLISH POETRY; BEING AN
IRREGULAR APPROACH TO THE
PSYCHOLOGY OF THIS ART,
FROM EVIDENCE MAINLY
SUBJECTIVE**

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Mainly Subjective by Robert Graves

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ROBERT GRAVES

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ON ENGLISH POETRY

*Being an Irregular Approach to the Psychology
of This Art, from Evidence Mainly Subjective*

BY ROBERT GRAVES



NEW YORK

ALFRED · A · KNOPF

MCMLXII

*To T. E. Lawrence of Arabia and
All Soul's College, Oxford, and to
W. H. R. Rivers of the Solomon Is-
lands and St. John's College, Cam-
bridge, my gratitude for valuable
critical help, and the dedication of
this book.*

. . . Also of the Mustarde Tarte: Suche
problemis to paynt, it longyth to his arte.

JOHN SKELTON.

Poetry subdues to union under its light yoke
all irreconcilable things.

P. B. SHELLEY.

NOTE

The greater part of this book will appear controversial, but any critic who expects me to argue on what I have written, is begged kindly to excuse me; my garrison is withdrawn without a shot fired and his artillery may blow the fortress to pieces at leisure. These notebook reflections are only offered as being based on the rules which regulate my own work at the moment, for many of which I claim no universal application and have promised no lasting regard. They have been suggested from time to time mostly by particular problems in the writing of my last two volumes of poetry. Hesitating to formulate at present a comprehensive water-tight philosophy of poetry, I have dispensed with a continuous argument, and so the sections either stand independently or are intended to get their force by suggestive neighbourliness rather than by logical catenation. The names of the glass houses in which my name as an authority on poetry lodges at present, are to be found on a back page.

It is a heartbreaking task to reconcile literary and scientific interests in the same book. Literary en-

NOTE

thusiasts seem to regard poetry as something miraculous, something which it is almost blasphemous to analyse, witness the outcry against R. L. Stevenson when he merely underlined examples of Shakespeare's wonderful dexterity in the manipulation of consonants; most scientists on the other hand, being either benevolently contemptuous of poetry, or if interested, insensitive to the emotional quality of words and their associative subtleties, themselves use words as weights and counters rather than as chemicals powerful in combination and have written, if at all, so boorishly about poetry that the breach has been actually widened. If any false scientific assumptions or any bad literary blunders I have made, be held up for popular execration, these may yet act as decoys to the truth which I am anxious to buy even at the price of a snubbing; and where in many cases no trouble has apparently been taken to check overstatements, there is this excuse to offer, that when putting a cat among pigeons it is always advisable to make it as large a cat as possible.

R. G.

Islip,
Oxford.

CONTENTS

- I DEFINITIONS, 13
- II THE NINE MUSES, 15
- III POETRY AND PRIMITIVE MAGIC, 19
- IV CONFLICT OF EMOTIONS, 22
- V THE PATTERN UNDERNEATH, 24
- VI INSPIRATION, 26
- VII THE PARABLE OF MR. POETA AND MR. LECTOR,
27
- VIII THE CARPENTER'S SON, 31
- IX THE GADDING VINE, 33
- X THE DEAD END AND THE MAN OF ONE POEM, 36
- XI SPENSER'S CUFFS, 38
- XII CONNECTION OF POETRY AND HUMOUR, 40
- XIII DICTION, 41
- XIV THE DAFFODILS, 42
- XV VERS LIBRE, 45
- XVI MOVING MOUNTAINS, 50
- XVII LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI, 50
- XVIII THE GENERAL ELLIOTT, 55
- XIX THE GOD CALLED POETRY, 62
- XX LOGICALIZATION, 66
- XXI LIMITATIONS, 69
- XXII THE NAUGHTY BOY, 71
- XXIII THE CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC IDEAS, 72
- XXIV COLOUR, 76
- XXV PUTTY, 78

CONTENTS

- XXVI READING ALOUD, 81
- XXVII L'ARTE DELLA PITTURA, 82
- XXVIII ON WRITING MUSICALLY, 83
- XXIX THE USE OF POETRY, 84
- XXX HISTORIES OF POETRY, 85
- XXXI THE BOWL MARKED DOG, 87
- XXXII THE ANALYTIC SPIRIT, 88
- XXXIII RHYME AND ALLITERATION, 89
- XXXIV AN AWKWARD FELLOW CALLED ARIPHRADES, 90
- XXXV IMPROVISING NEW CONVENTIONS, 92
- XXXVI WHEN IN DOUBT . . . , 93
- XXXVII THE EDITOR WITH THE MUCKRAKE, 94
- XXXVIII THE MORAL QUESTION, 94
- XXXIX THE POET AS OUTSIDER, 96
 - XL A POLITE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, 97
 - XLI FAKE POETRY, BAD POETRY AND MERE VERSE,
97
 - XLII A DIALOGUE ON FAKE POETRY, 101
 - XLIII ASKING ADVICE, 102
 - XLIV SURFACE FAULTS, AN ILLUSTRATION, 103
 - XLV LINKED SWEETNESS LONG DRAWN OUT, 106
 - XLVI THE FABLE OF THE IDEAL GADGET, 108
 - XLVII SEQUELS ARE BARRED, 111
 - XLVIII TOM FOOL, 111
 - XLIX CROSS RHYTHM AND RESOLUTION, 113
 - L MY NAME IS LEGION, FOR WE ARE MANY, 116
 - LI THE PIG BABY, 121
 - LII APOLOGY FOR DEFINITIONS, 122
 - LIII TIMES AND SEASONS, 124
 - LIV TWO HERESIES, 125
 - LV THE ART OF EXPRESSION, 126
 - LVI GHOSTS IN THE SHELDONIAN, 129
 - LVII THE LAYING-ON OF HANDS, 130
 - LVIII WAYS AND MEANS, 132