

The Face in the Mirror

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‘The Face in the Mirror’ is a Robert Graves poem published first in January 1957; doubly a Robert Graves poem, for it is both by the sixty-one-year-old Graves and – at first glance, at least – about him:¹

THE FACE IN THE MIRROR

Grey haunted eyes, absent-mindedly glaring
From wide, uneven orbits; one brow drooping
Somewhat over the eye
Because of a missile fragment still inhering,
Skin deep, as a foolish record of old-world fighting.

Crookedly broken nose – low tackling caused it;
Cheeks, furrowed; coarse grey hair, flying frenetic;
Forehead, wrinkled and high;
Jowls, prominent; ears, large; jaw, pugilistic;
Teeth, few; lips, full and ruddy; mouth, ascetic.

I pause with razor poised, scowling derision
At the mirrored man whose beard needs my attention,
And once more ask him why
He still stands ready, with a boy’s presumption,
To court the queen in her high silk pavilion.

A self-portrait, surely. Yet it’s worth remarking that, very much unlike its status in the world of figurative art, the self-portrait in lyric poetry is a relatively rare genre – at any rate, in its literal sense of rendering a physical likeness as opposed to looser, more metaphorical expressions of the poetic ego’s endless self-fascination. ‘The Face in the Mirror’ might, of course, lay itself open to the objection that its labour is pointless: there are many

good photographs to do the same job, as well as paintings, and even sculpture. Yet no, not the same job really; for these are portraits and not self-portraits. All the same, this particular self-portrait has set itself the task of achieving the portraitist's accuracy. The man's face here corresponds pretty closely with the physical description offered by the *DNB* entry on Graves: 'this large man with thick dark curly hair and blue eyes, whose otherwise regular features were disturbed by a nose which had been broken in a game of rigger and a slightly twisted mouth'.² The darkness of the hair has given way with time to greyness; but the broken nose is there, and the same mouth.

Like any good self-portraitist, Graves looks rather closer at himself in the act of looking: the poem's first stanza is unflatteringly full in its details of the Gravesian gaze. It is well known that pictorial self-portraits often result from literal self-regard in the form of mirror-gazing, and that their common aspect of melancholy is therefore likely to be more truly one of working concentration; in poetry, that particular accident is less likely to occur. Graves's poem offers a portrait that is more than 'skin-deep' – its second word, 'haunted' tells us as much – but this does not mean that it will neglect the exact look of the skin. There is 'one brow drooping / Somewhat over the eye' (with an under-the-skin explanation for this), and 'Cheeks, furrowed', 'Forehead, wrinkled and high': none of this can be achieved without the visual attention a painter might more routinely employ. Obviously (and this is the case for figurative portraits and self-portraits too) what you see is not all of what you get in this kind of gaze; but what you see is where you start, and it cannot be neglected, faked, or skipped over.

So, is 'the Face in the Mirror' a portrait of the artist as an old man? (Sixty-one, it is true, is by no means unchallengeably 'old'; but it is certainly not young.) The flesh, in this poem, displays at least some of the experience it carries – literally so, in the case of that drooping brow and the 'missile fragment still inhering' there. To possess few teeth, and to have instead 'jowls' (not for the young, jowls – and we mustn't flinch from looking *OED* 'jowl' *n*²

full in the face: ‘The external throat or neck when fat or prominent; the pendulous flesh extending from the chops to the throat’). What is it, though, for an ageing man to look closely this long – for ten whole lines – at his own face? The question naturally arising is not so much what, but who does he see there?

The first answer to this is, simply enough, he sees himself. More fussily, as an artist he sees the self; and as an artist, it’s his task to make something of what he sees. The third stanza of Graves’s poem finds that the unpromising physical specimen of the first two stanzas brushes up rather well – well enough, anyway, to stand ready ‘To court the queen in her high silk pavilion’.

Actually, though, this impression of the poem is the result of its own sleight of hand, for no literal brushing-up has yet been undertaken at the poem’s close. ‘The mirrored man’ has not yet received any ‘attention’ from the first-person speaker, ‘with razor poised’ – all that is presumably still to come – but it is the final image in the poem which has the last, resonant, word. The poem ends by realising a stance which – however unpromising the raw materials – the mirrored self is going to achieve. If courtship is a surprising thing for an ageing man to be getting up to, we are reminded also that this ageing man still possesses all of ‘a boy’s presumption’.

At this point, it’s worth being explicit about a couple of things that are in any case not exactly concealed in the poem. First, the self here is male; second, its courting ambitions are heterosexual ones (albeit exaltedly so). Age, and the physical manifestations of age, are not usually sources of male sexual advantage; and in this respect, the mirror will not lie. The self ‘with razor poised’ might as well, perhaps, be putting an end to the life of that mirrored face (is Graves recalling for a moment, if only subliminally, Castlereagh’s gruesome self-dispatch?) as getting it into shape for a spot of courtship. The sheer persistence of self-regard, though, is at issue here; and this is always a potentially comic persistence. Potentially – though attempts to claim it for pathos or even tragedy have in fact been made (very much at their own risk). Graves’s determination to question the mirrored man, to ‘once

more ask him why' he is yet again going about all this, helps to steer the poem clear of such perilous attempts. Nevertheless, the bravado of the last lines is only partly a thing open to question; partly, too, it is an attitude conclusively struck, by being struck at the conclusion. The poem seems to have moved far, and very quickly, from the 'scowling derision' at the beginning of its final stanza; and might the very impulse to 'derision', we are left to wonder, be a cause of that unlovely 'scowling' (with its ugly echo of the 'Jowls' two lines back)? At all events, Graves leaves us in no doubt that 'derision' is altogether too easy a response in these circumstances.

What do you see, a number of readers might want to ask a number of poets, when you look in a mirror? That might or might not be a good question, in that it might or might not be one a poet can honestly answer; better, because more literal, would be the question, When do you look in a mirror? There are decent and not so decent answers to that: we might be disarmed by a response of 'Never'; and equally so by one of 'All the time'; while we're liable to believe the mundane answer – for unbearded poets at least – that 'I look in the shaving mirror every morning'. More generally, a man who never shaves is a man with no need to confront his own face on a daily basis – the face which, as Graves's poem knows, holds and withholds so much of and about the self.

In *Wessex Poems*, published in 1898 when he was fifty-eight years old, Thomas Hardy's 'I look into my glass' may be the work of a melancholic man, but is assuredly that of a man who is clean-shaven:³

I look into my glass,
And view my wasting skin,
And say, 'Would God it came to pass
My heart had shrunk as thin!'

For then, I, undistrest
By hearts grown cold to me,

Could lonely wait my endless rest
With equanimity.

But Time, to make me grieve,
Part steals, lets part abide;
And shakes this fragile frame at eve
With throbbings of noontide.

Inevitably, this is a poem that ghosts Graves's 'The Face in the Mirror', and it is a dauntingly powerful presence by which to be haunted. Hardy, bearded (as was the fashion) as a young man, was by this stage merely the sporter of a moustache; when he looks into the mirror, he seems to be in little danger of liking what he sees. 'My wasting skin' is on bare display right at the beginning; and 'wasting', like 'thin', allows little room for ambiguity in the matter of age and physical decay. But here, too, trouble is more than skin-deep. 'My heart' is the problem – and specifically the heart's desire to win the hearts of others, which persists unabated, taking no heed of all the evidence which 'hearts grown cold to me' unquestionably present. As often in Hardy's lyrics, the self is an innocent victim of Time's smiling taste for ironies, disproportion, and cruel mismatches. 'Heart', Hardy calls the cheated aspect of the self; but what Time lets abide is, to speak more plainly, desire; and 'this fragile form' is troubled not by being shaken alone – one can be emotionally and metaphorically 'shaken', after all, by all kinds of things – but by disarmingly physical 'throbbings'. And there is the whole joke, if you like: the more 'wasting' the body, the less chance there can be of its libidinous 'throbbings' finding satisfaction. Not that Hardy's poem is intended to be funny; but Hardy is well aware that a young man might easily laugh at it, all the same.

'The Face in the Mirror' evidently has dealings with 'I look into my glass', but both poems feature in a larger complex of poetic meditation on the self and its self-regard which includes a number of major twentieth century poets. If I say that these are all male poets, it may allay suspicions of sexism to add that the central

scenario for this meditation is one in front of the shaving-mirror. (Were I to recommend that more women poets should take up shaving, I'm greatly afraid my point would be misunderstood.) A key passage comes from a poet writing at the age of seventy-four, and it is well known:⁴

Poetry indeed seems to me more physical than intellectual. A year or two ago, in common with others, I received from America a request that I would define poetry. I replied that I could no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat, but that I thought we both recognised the object by the symptoms which it provokes in us. One of these symptoms was described in connexion with another object by Eliphaz the Temanite: 'A spirit passed before my face: the hair of my flesh stood up.' Experience has taught me, when I am shaving of a morning, to keep watch over my thoughts, because, if a line of poetry strays into my memory, my skin bristles so that the razor ceases to act. This particular symptom is accompanied by a shiver down the spine; there is another kind which consists in a constriction of the throat and a precipitation of water to the eyes; and there is a third which I can only describe by borrowing a phrase from one of Keats's last letters, where he says, speaking of Fanny Brawne, 'everything that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear.' The seat of this sensation is the pit of the stomach.

A. E. Housman, of course (moustache; no beard since youth) in his *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (1933). The conjunction of poetry and the self could hardly be much more literal than this: it is 'when I am shaving of a morning' that lines of poetry come and do their physical business – as a bothersome hindrance to a good shave, in fact. Poetry does this while Housman is looking himself full in the face. There are tears, too, to get in the way of clarity – though Housman's phrase, 'a precipitation of water to the eyes',

makes them sound more like the rheumy afflictions of old age than the signs of emotional transport or sympathy. And it's entirely appropriate that one of Job's comforters should be brought in with supporting evidence. Eliphaz the Temanite has a lot of bad news to impart:⁵

In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image *was* before mine eyes, *there was* silence, and I heard a voice, *saying*, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: How much less *in* them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation *is* in the dust, *which* are crushed before the moth? They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding *it*.

Bones might fairly be shaken by this kind of thing, shaken in the fear and trembling that has nothing to do with the body's 'throbbings', but its relevance to Housman's morning jitters is partly in the threat – the metaphysical, absolute threat – which it offers to the self. Looking at yourself, your own ultimate nothingness rises up to look back at you through your own eyes: and poetry, Housman suggests, does this.

Eleven years earlier, in *Last Poems* (1922), the sixty-three-year-old Housman's mornings were no better:⁶

Yonder see the morning blink:
 The sun is up, and up must I,
 To wash and dress and eat and drink
 And look at things and talk and think
 And work, and God knows why.

Oh, often have I washed and dressed
 And what's to show for all my pain?
 Let me lie abed and rest:
 Ten thousand times I've done my best
 And all's to do again.

No mirrors here, though all of that washing and dressing would hardly be accomplished entirely without their aid: but the situation is very similar to that in front of the shaving mirror, with its bleak message of meaningless repetition, protracted to no end by a continually labouring physical self. To make things worse (if worse could be), the poem's composition actually dates back to 1895, when Housman was a comparatively youthful thirty-six years of age. (Knowing this also makes that poetic-sounding 'Ten thousand times' rather more accurate.) In terms of self-regard, the poem is at the other end of the spectrum from Hardy and Graves: here, there is only the physical self, and only its pointless routines, with nothing beyond, above, or underneath them. This poem's speaker is undoubtedly among the host of those who 'perish for ever without any regarding it': in their different ways, the self-regards of Hardy and Graves are putting up much more of a fight.

That fight, though, is one waged by the body. In fact, Housman in *The Name and Nature of Poetry* makes poetry into something distinctly bodily: 'if I were obliged, not to define poetry, but to name the class of things to which it belongs, I should call it a secretion; whether a natural secretion, like turpentine in the fir, or a morbid secretion, like the pearl in the oyster.'⁷ That 'precipitation of water to the eyes' is probably expressed by this; and there are worse – that is, less sentimentally appealing – bodily secretions than tears. What other natural functions of the male body are going unmentioned here? In 1938, with all the shallow brilliance of the young, a thirty-one-year-old W. H. Auden wrote of Housman as someone who 'Kept tears like dirty postcards in a drawer', homing in by instinct on his subject's furtiveness about 'secretions' as a form of denied, or short-circuited, sexuality.⁸ Much later, though, Auden's 'The Geography of the House'

(written *anno aetatis* 57), in its act of homage to the blessed healthiness of regular bodily functions ('to start the morning / With a satisfactory / Dump is a good omen / All our adult days') has a better sense of proportion about such things:⁹

Sex is but a dream to
Seventy-and-over,
But a joy proposed un-
-til we start to shave.

And yes, this purely incidental point that sexual maturity and the need to shave coincide, is perfectly true (as far as it goes), and relevant to poems like Graves's and Hardy's – with the grim proviso that the need to shave goes on even after sexual activity has become no more than 'a dream'. As an observation, this is all very reasonable in tone, and a matter of the higher pleasantry, though in truth the vistas it opens are not all that far removed from those explored so enthusiastically by Eliphaz the Temanite.

Housman seems the least likely person to make reports from the front line of poetic mystery; but his experiences before the shaving mirror are exactly – and flatly – just that. In the 1930s, they were scoffed at by the young, up-to-date and sophisticated; but Robert Graves proved willing to pay them the respect they deserved. Publishing *The White Goddess* when he was fifty-three, Graves was more than able to accommodate Housman's experience of poetry there:¹⁰

Perfect faithfulness to the Theme affects the reader of a poem with a strange feeling, between delight and horror, of which the purely physical effect is that the hair literally stands on end. A. E. Housman's test of a true poem was simple and practical: does it make the hairs of one's chin bristle if one repeats it silently when shaving?

Graves is turning Housman's remarks into a 'test of a true poem' – something which Housman himself did not claim for them – but

what he is not doing here is giggling behind Housman's back. Instead, Graves cues the argument of *The White Goddess*, which is about to unfold, by adding: 'But he did not explain *why* the hairs should bristle'. Graves's book can explain that.¹¹

The reason why the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, the throat is constricted, the skin crawls and a shiver runs down the spine when one writes or reads a true poem is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust – the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death.

These are the Housman symptoms, accurately recounted; but Graves's explanation is remote from anything Housman would have countenanced – or even, perhaps, comprehended. That queen-bee of classical textual studies might have had a thing or two to say about Graves's adventures in comparative philology and mythology (and he was capable of delivering quite a sting), but the 'lust' which Graves attributes to his experience of poetry – if it had existed at all – was never directed towards goddesses, muses, or mothers. It is interesting, and revealing, that Graves needs to charge the shaving mirror scenario with heterosexual desire. Housman may have known all kinds of despair as he confronted his ageing face in the shaving mirror; but he could not share in the alarm and unease felt by Graves and Hardy, anxious about their chances with younger women.

In 1948, the year in which *The White Goddess* was published, W. H. Auden wrote a piece for *The Kenyon Review* about a poet whose presence in any discussion of the self, male self-regard, and anxiety over failing sexual powers is completely essential. That same poet, however, was central to understanding modern poetry's relations with 'the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living', but found no place in Graves's book. Auden took aim at poets' 'nonsense' in his article, and his principal target was W. B. Yeats. Housman, he granted, was just as nonsensical, if less

mad: ‘A. E. Housman’s pessimistic stoicism seems to me nonsense too, but at least it is the kind of nonsense that can be believed by a gentleman – but mediums, spells, the Mysterious Orient – *how* embarrassing.’¹² One wonders how far Auden believed that the central propositions of *The White Goddess* were ‘nonsense that can be believed by a gentleman’ – though, in fairness, he immediately added the sane reflection that we should not ‘claim credit for rejecting what we have no temptation to accept’.

W. B. Yeats – mediums, spells, and all – is the major poet of ageing male libido, whose presence ‘The Face in the Mirror’ avoids almost too convincingly. It’s possible to fly in that poem’s face critically, and say that the reason Graves makes such an elaborate point of itemising his own features as those of ‘the mirrored man’ is that he fears the face he sees in the mirror is really that of Yeats. But one needn’t fly quite that far, or that fast. Naturally, there is a long, and convoluted, story to be told about Yeats’s degree of influence over Graves; but assuredly, Graves himself was the last man to be able to tell it. When Graves talks about ‘the ancient power of fright and lust’, his word ‘lust’ is Yeats’s word, from the quatrain published when he was seventy-two, in 1938:¹³

You think it horrible that lust and rage
Should dance attention upon my old age;
They were not such a plague when I was young;
What else have I to spur me into song?

‘There is one story and one story only’, to quote Graves’s ‘To Juan at the Winter Solstice’: and this is it. T. S. Eliot’s reaction, in 1940 (aged fifty-one), was based on accepting Yeats’s quatrain for exactly what it is, a self-portrait: what’s more, it is the kind of portrait in which we (at least, we men) can see ourselves. ‘Horrible’ is how Yeats sees himself striking ‘You’, and it is the kind of metaphorical word which leans heavily on its visual power. Doubtless, Dorian Gray’s picture is somewhere in this

short poem's attic, as it were. The whole of Eliot's praise for the quatrain might well be said to resonate in relation to Graves:¹⁴

Most men either cling to the experiences of youth, so that their writing becomes an insincere mimicry of their earlier work, or they leave their passion behind, and write only from the head, with a hollow and wasted virtuosity. There is another and even worse temptation: that of becoming dignified, of becoming public figures with only a public existence – coat-racks hung with decorations and distinctions, doing, saying, and even thinking and feeling only what they believe the public expects of them. Yeats was not that kind of poet: and it is, perhaps, a reason why young men should find his later poetry more acceptable than older men easily can. For the young can see him as a poet who in his work remained in the best sense always young, who even in one sense became young as he aged. But the old, unless they are stirred to something of the honesty with oneself expressed in the poetry, will be shocked by such a revelation of what a man really is and remains. They will refuse to believe that they are like that.

'Hollow and wasted': that description of 'virtuosity' brings technical skill into grisly contact with the ageing flesh of the body, with Hardy's 'wasting skin'. Old men and young men (and where exactly does Eliot feel he belongs between these two extremes?) seem to want very different things out of poetry – but it is the young, Eliot implies, who are more likely to find Yeats's 'honesty' acceptable. Old men, perhaps, cannot face Yeats's true portraiture: 'such a revelation of what a man really is and remains' is not easy viewing. Furthermore, Eliot insists, it is true. Quoting the poem, he goes on to offer a reading:¹⁵

These lines are very impressive and not very pleasant, and the sentiment has recently been criticized by an English critic whom I generally respect. But I think he misread them.

I do not read them as a personal confession of a man who differed from other men, but of a man who was essentially the same as most other men; the only difference is in the greater clarity, honesty and vigour. To what honest man, old enough, can these sentiments be entirely alien? They can be subdued and disciplined by religion, but who can say that they are dead? Only those to whom the maxim of La Rochefoucauld applies: ‘Quand les vices nous quittent, nous nous flattons de la créance que c’est nous qui les quittons.’ The tragedy of Yeats’ epigram is all in the last line.

It is quite unusual, really, to find occasion to speak of Yeats as ‘a man who was essentially the same as other men’; but it is clear that Eliot finds the common lot of men – and in particular of older men – in his ‘lust and rage’. This is all, indeed, ‘not very pleasant’; and Eliot’s confidence in the subduing and disciplining of ‘religion’ rings faint – as faint, in fact, as Housman’s cleaving unto ‘pessimistic stoicism’. To say that ‘The tragedy of Yeats’ epigram is all in the last line’ is to admit that poetry and the self’s worst aspect can appear in one and the same mirror.

Yeats’s word, ‘plague’, has as much interest as ‘lust and rage’. The torment – it is by implication ultimately a fatal torment – of ‘lust and rage’ is part of the toll which time takes on the physical body, the very subject of the portrait. Graves used the word ‘plague’ to refer to the persistence into age of poetry-writing itself: in his Foreword to *Poems 1953* (a couple of short, grumpy paragraphs), he asked: ‘though I have written more poems in the last two years than in the previous ten, must I apologize for having been more than usually plagued?’¹⁶ In a private letter three years earlier, he claimed that ‘the Goddess has been plaguing me lately, very cruelly, and I have managed to satisfy her by two or three poems written in red arterial blood.’¹⁷ These things were, very likely, not such a plague when Graves was young.

It will not be possible here to embark on a proper discussion of the relation between Yeats and Graves as poets: the story is in some ways a paradoxical one, and it impacts in complicated ways

on the large (and important) question of Yeats's twentieth century poetic reception more generally. Unsurprisingly, Yeats's side of the story is a simple one: in the 1930s, he much preferred Laura Riding's poetry to Graves's (in line, perhaps, with his general rule at that time of favouring female over male contemporary poets), and in 1936, collecting poets while minding the pennies for his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, he told Dorothy Wellesley that 'Laura Reading' had been pressing the case of Graves's poems, but 'I don't want Graves: the two together would cost me twenty pounds. I have already over spent by about fifty pounds the five hundred pounds the Oxford press set aside to pay authors. The fifty pound must come out of my own pocket & that is almost empty.'¹⁸ The folly and pettiness of the old, or the critical wisdom of age? As far as Yeats's *Oxford Book* is concerned, the judgement of posterity has so far inclined to the former; and the judgement of the time, too, it should be added – as with Louis MacNeice's conclusion in a letter that 'It seems that Yeats's Oxford Book is loony'.¹⁹

Graves's side of things is much more difficult to describe, understand, and evaluate. At the very least, in approaching the issue of Yeats's influence, it will not do to take Graves's numerous pronouncements – sincerely felt as they may have been – at their face value. Here, if anywhere, we can say that there are decided limits to the accuracy of poets' self-scrutiny: Graves's indebtedness to, and artistic proximity to W. B. Yeats are as plain as the nose on his face, but they are precisely what he himself cannot see. Yet there is nothing discreditable in this indebtedness, or this proximity; and there is no need to suggest that a work like *The White Goddess* is nothing more for Graves than an elaborate coping mechanism for the influence of W. B. Yeats. On the contrary, Graves is the one lyric poet who manages Yeats's influence most expertly, and productively, in formal as well as more broadly thematic terms. That, however, he would not let himself see.

One doubts whether Eliphaz the Temanite was in the habit of shaving; but what he saw when he saw himself, and what he

thought all men must see, can be repeated:

In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep
falleth on men, fear came upon me, and trembling, which
made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my
face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could
not discern the form thereof: an image *was* before mine
eyes, *there was* silence, and I heard a voice, *saying*, Shall
mortal man be more just than God?

It is possible that Graves was better able to understand this than Housman had been. To return, finally, to the shaving mirror: it is here that the poetic self, masculinity, age, and sexual ambition are crossed with poetry itself, in its aspect of uncanny power. That crossing is by no means an easy one, in that its implications are far from easy to accept, for they concern precisely and uncomfortably ‘what a man really is and remains’. Housman knows this, and opts out; Hardy sees it, and hopes to contain it with irony; Eliot acknowledges it, and flinches; only Yeats and Graves both recognise and fully accept its truth. For Graves, it is worth the questioning; and he knows (like Yeats) that such questioning, whatever the state of the flesh might be, is never wasted:

I pause with razor poised, scowling derision
At the mirrored man whose beard needs my attention,
And once more ask him why
He still stands ready, with a boy’s presumption,
To court the queen in her high silk pavilion.

Christ Church, Oxford

NOTES

¹ Robert Graves, *Complete Poems*, II, ed. by Beryl Graves and Dunstan Ward (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p. 237. The poem was first

collected in *Five Pens in Hand* (1957): for full details of publication history see *Complete Poems*, II, p. 262.

² Richard Perceval Graves, 'Robert Graves', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edn, May 2010.

³ Thomas Hardy, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Samuel Hynes, I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 106 (originally the final poem in Hardy's *Wessex Poems* (1898)).

⁴ A. E. Housman, *The Name and Nature of Poetry* (1933), *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, ed. by Christopher Ricks (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), pp. 369–70.

⁵ Job 4. 13–20 (King James Bible).

⁶ A. E. Housman, *Last Poems* (1922), XI (dated 'Dec '95' in MS), *Poems of A. E. Housman*, ed. by Archie Burnett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 80.

⁷ A. E. Housman, *Collected Poems and Selected Prose*, p. 370.

⁸ W. H. Auden, 'A. E. Housman' (1938), *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 2007), p. 182.

⁹ W. H. Auden, 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat', VI, 'The Geography of the House' (1964), *Collected Poems*, p. 697.

¹⁰ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948), ed. by Grevel Lindop (London: Faber, 1999), p. 17.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹² W. H. Auden, 'Yeats as an Example', *Kenyon Review* (Spring 1948), *Prose*, II, 1939–1948, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 2002), p. 385.

¹³ W. B. Yeats, 'The Spur' (1938), *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. by Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspatch (London: Macmillan, 1956), p. 591.

¹⁴ T. S. Eliot, 'Yeats' (1940), *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), p. 257.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 257–58.

¹⁶ Robert Graves, 'Foreword' to *Poems 1953*, quoted in *Complete Poems*, II, p. 351.

¹⁷ Robert Graves, letter to James Reeves, 14 December 1950, quoted in *Complete Poems*, II, p. 344.

¹⁸ W. B. Yeats, letter to Dorothy Wellesley, 26 April 1936, *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats: Electronic Edition* (InteleX), item 6452.

¹⁹ Louis MacNeice, letter to Mrs E. R. Dodds, 26 November 1936, *Letters of Louis MacNeice*, ed. by Jonathan Allison (London: Faber, 2010), p. 289.