

down the slope of Aschenbach's dream," or of "mock-eyed sirens with gold-tipped breasts," swarm into Soby's consciousness. For Soby knows that "Every man is his own Pygmalion," and that Cynthia, the girl from Winnetka, might be a "gold-leafed" Primavera, beautiful and shameless as spring. In this the lover and the artist are indeed of one imagination compact: they create the very vision that must possess them. And the act of creation, like the deepest passion, is impersonal.

The brain was in the head if one was lucky—but what one called the mind was in the body, and the wisdom of the body counseled the brain what to feel and think. It was the source of fiction, as well as what were known as facts . . . this was also true . . . of the artist's imagination. . . . The personal was elevated to the impersonal.

It is thus that we understand Cynthia's slogan, "what a way to go," the elemental Bacchic cry of surrender, the voice of the body's wisdom.

Mr. Morris, however, is too wry and sophisticated a writer, in this particular instance, to make that cry credible. Art, as Thomas Mann knew, can parody itself with advantage, and literature may thrive on the sense of incongruity. It is right for Soby to meet his Cynthia first under a café table. But in the end the mysteries of Dionysus are not expressed in whimsey; they are not propagated by confetti. Mr. Morris cannot even evoke in his *Bal Masque* the dark force of Walpurgis Night, degenerate child of the mysteries. "What a Way to Go" would have succeeded better had it pretended to less. Its failure, however, underlies the universal burden of the novelist in an age of irony.

LITTLE POSTSCRIPT: Gus had knobby knees, big ears, and brown eyes like an owl's. He had a lively curiosity about the world, which often confused him. And he also had a nephew his own age, which confused him even more. Boys of even are not supposed to be uncles. The trouble was, nobody explained anything to Gus. His older sister Sally simply came back home, complete with her husband, Wayne, and her son, Tom—"a handsome little bull of a boy . . . whose mother made him stay a baby." Wayne wanted to move to the ranch he had inherited, and Sally wanted to live in town; while they argued through the summer, Gus and Tom were thrown together in uneasy alliance. Uneasy, because Tom mostly wanted to flap and crow like a rooster (which embarrassed his uncle), and Gus wanted to figure things out.

How, for instance, could his parents be Tom's grandparents? Why was his mother so much older than a neighbor-

hood canvass revealed other mothers to be? Did this mean his father was old enough to die? And how, above all, could he forgive his father for doing the thing that had produced Gus and created what neighbors laughingly called "the little postscript"?

How Gus managed to get the stars straight and clear in a reeling sky, and how he learned that if you love enough you don't need to forgive, is the story Margaret Abrams has to tell in "**The Uncle**" (Houghton Mifflin, \$3.50). A great many people are going to find it a charming and sensitive story of childhood. It is necessary to add, however, that they do not include a certain eleven-year-old boy who was asked to read the book for his professional opinion. His comment was succinct: "This author doesn't know *anything* about boys!" he snorted. This reviewer isn't so positive; but, after contemplating a passage in which Gus solemnly considers the "dignity and grace" of adults, she is inclined to agree with the junior snorter. —MARGARET PARTON.

WAR AGAINST HUMANITY: The record of the German occupation of Poland is one of the worst chapters in the long and cruel history of mankind, and anyone who lived through it has a story to tell. Anna Langfus tells hers in her semi-autobiographical novel, "**The**

Whole Land Brimstone" (Pantheon, \$4.95). The title taken from Deuteronomy, refers to the wrath of the Lord.

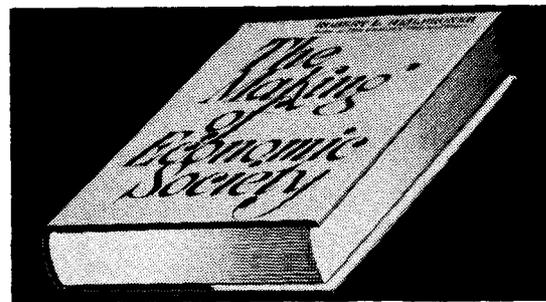
Mme. Langfus was nineteen when the Germans invaded Poland. Two years later she and her family had been herded into the Warsaw ghetto. She escaped with her husband, wandering and hiding and working with Polish resistance groups. Eventually they were arrested, and her husband was shot; since she did not look Jewish she escaped that time, but was condemned to death shortly afterward. Somehow she survived; but by the end of the war she had suffered so much horror that she was sickened rather than grateful at the thought of going on living.

Although in Peter Wiles's translation her prose is lucid, at times she rushes her narrative so that important transitions are omitted. On the other hand, when the strain of events becomes unbearable to her heroine, Mme. Langfus abandons reality and sinks into strange, nightmarish dreams that are beautifully handled.

But in the end the subject transcends the book. This is a report on a war against humanity that is still being waged. Mme. Langfus throws no new light on it, but as long as such things can happen again, we should see to it that they are not forgotten.

—HANS KONINGSBERGER.

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The Wisdom of the White Goddess

"Oxford Addresses on Poetry," by Robert Graves (Doubleday, 141 pp. \$3.95), reveals its nearly seventy-year-old author as still an *enfant terrible*, bristling with wit, heresy, and invitations to nonconformity. James Gray, a close observer of the contemporary literary scene, is the author of "On Second Thought."

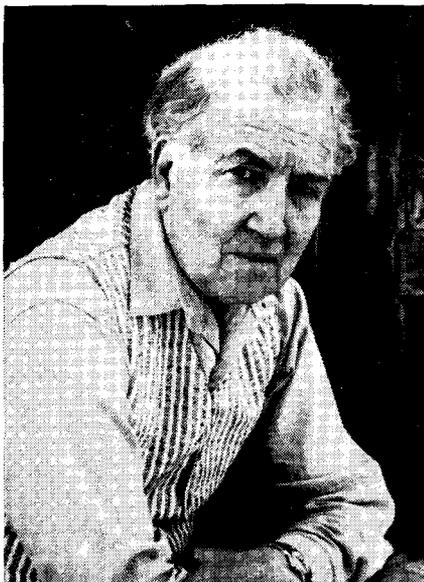
By JAMES GRAY

IF THE young continue to deserve their reputation for treasuring audacity, the students at Oxford must have indeed greatly enjoyed certain experiences of the Michaelmas term, 1961, when they heard Robert Graves give his public lectures as Professor of Poetry. What he had to say is now presented to a wider audience in a book whose slender form bulges with provocative heresies, exuberant invitations to nonconformity, assertions of individuality made with convincing gusto, and suggestions about the true source of creative inspiration that should offer beguiling promises to a beginner in art.

Mr. Graves must surely have seemed to be the youngest person in the hall where he spoke. For he made not the slightest concession to orthodox respectability of opinion, honored only "perfect freedom," romped through his assignment scattering witty paradoxes, gossip, and challenges to new quarrels as he went. His age is nearly seventy, but for all that he is still the *enfant terrible* of the academies.

To anyone who has looked into the scores of volumes of poetry, novels, biographies, pamphlets, oddities of social study—what not?—in which Robert Graves has capsuled his explosive talents, the performances at Oxford cannot have been surprising. Each time he has discharged another book, a new area of his originality has been dazzlingly illuminated. Yet, for a man so variable, he has shown a remarkable consistency of outlook. All that he asks of any work of art—his own or another's—is that it be an expression of "human truth," apprehended in a mood of dedication by a man who values "stubborn imaginative freedom."

It cannot be said of his discussions of the practice of poetry that they establish new canons of art. Indeed, that



Robert Graves—"provocative heresies."

is the last thing that Robert Graves would wish to do. He would not found a school of poetry if he could; and he would distrust, if he did not scorn, any writer who might seek to become his follower. Creative effort is an affair for the "individual poet in privacy." Its impulse, Graves insists, is "almost anti-social." Achievements worth preserving are brought back from an "emotional trace" in which the artist is in intensely personal communication with his Muse.

IF this is less than explicit about the process of bringing a poem into being, Robert Graves has other hints to offer to one who wishes to become an initiate in the rites of art. The emotional trance is invited through an invocation of the "White Goddess . . . the Mother of All Living." This "perpetual other woman" in the poet's life blesses him with an "obsessive love" from which "proceed the poems of the trance." In these, "the ancient mythical elements thickly assemble."

Here the lectures edge toward another of Robert Graves's favorite themes: the presiding genius of woman in human experience. The poet's White Goddess may well become embodied temporarily, even permanently, in the person of a real woman. If the poet is wise, he will recognize the "age-old moral ascendancy" of her sex; but, again if he is wise, he will not wish to

have her educated. As Robert Graves tells us, instruction will only destroy woman's special asset, which is her intuition. It would be interesting to know what the young women of the Oxford community made of that!

If the wisdom of the White Goddess remains vague, there is nothing in the least doubtful about what Robert Graves has made of it in forming his own tastes. He likes and he dislikes with vigor and vehemence. Among his brothers in spirit are John Skelton, "the earliest and clearest example of the dedicated poet"; John Donne, admired chiefly, it would appear, for his candor and his wit; and Sir Walter Raleigh, author of "the most compelling of all Muse poems in English." Graves's most savage antipathy is reserved for a shining mark. He bangs expertly away at what is for him the fraudulent effrontery of—don't risk a guess of whom—Virgil!

According to Graves, there was the anti-poet of all time; a timorous, time-serving imitator and degrader of the work of his betters. His technical tricks served only to "divorce poetry from common sense." He lacked all originality and courage, produced a tawdry "official Roman epic, glorifying the divinely descended Caesars as fated rulers of the world," and created in Aeneas the arch-cad of literature.

This diatribe is produced not merely for staggering effect. Graves means every denigrating word of it. What shocks him into the desire to shock is his belief that a subservient school of critics, international in authority and meanly slavish in taste, has dutifully pretended generation after generation, to find genius in the work of a man who, as Wolcott Gibbs once said, "went a long way out of his way to write a poem." To Graves, Virgil is the made poet, the laboriously plodding cultist, the archetype of all official poet-laureates, without spontaneity, humor, insight, or joy in his work.

A book of this kind cannot fail to be readable. Robert Graves's temper is imperishably youthful. He is deeply personally involved in every judgment that he makes. To be sure, he shows the defects of his high spirits. Sometimes his wit frays into mere facetiousness. He does not hesitate to use his erudition as a vehicle for spreading 2,000-year-old scandals, or as a prop to support whims of critical interpretation. But even these caprices may be regarded as assets in the performance of a man who wishes less to instruct than to display and to share his gifts of ardor. Always jealous of his identity as poet and creative artist, Robert Graves has no difficulty here in supporting his claim to originality when he assumes the role of critic.