

THE GRAVES DIARY

A CONTROVERSIAL MYSTERY

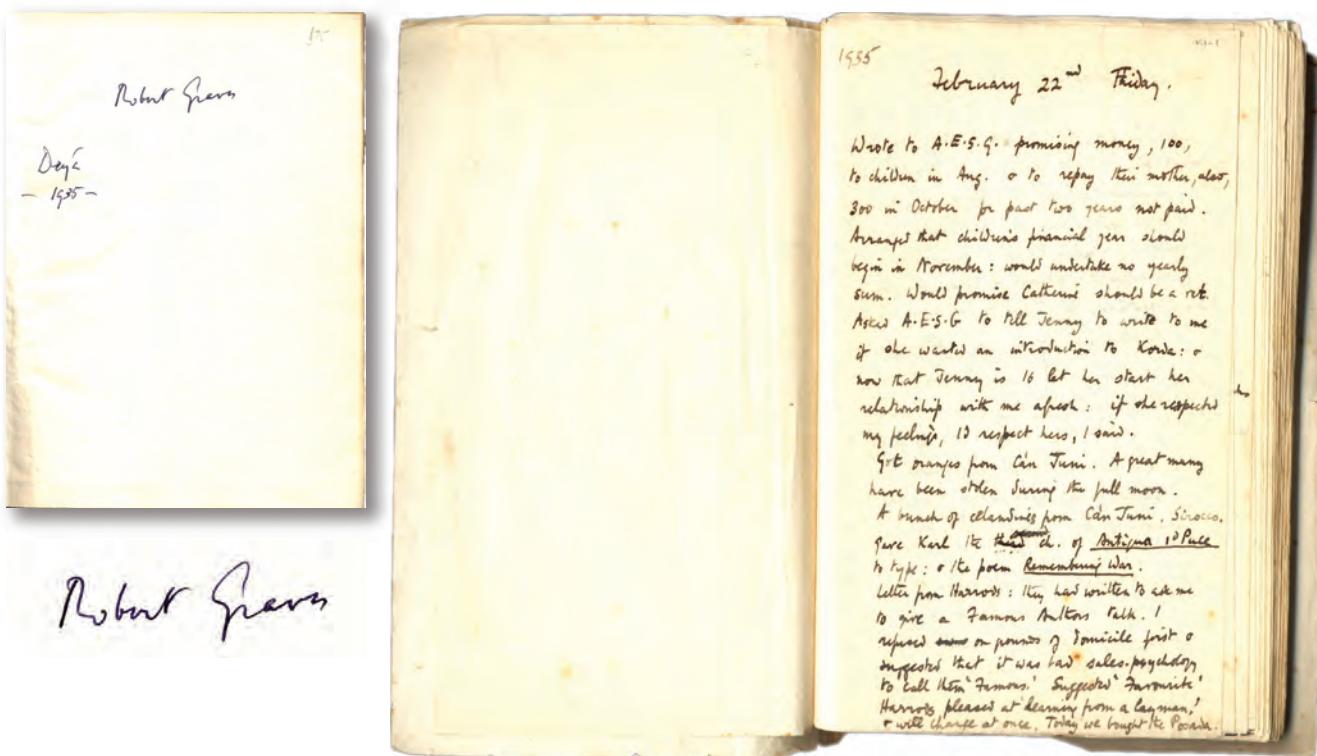
ELIZABETH GROVE-WHITE



IN APRIL 1970, when the University of Victoria Special Collections Library acquired Robert Graves's autograph diaries of the years 1935–1939, the University Librarian Dean Halliwell had little inkling of the controversies this apparently innocuous acquisition would unleash.

Following the acquisition of the highly sensitive Laracuen letters,¹ these handwritten diaries—written on 4to sheets, folded horizontally to form 8vo booklets with one recto page devoted to each day—must have seemed relatively harmless. Although rich in daily detail, Graves' diaries, written in his distinctive hand with an old-fashioned steel-nibbed pen, convey little if any direct personal reflection. Graves' meticulous daily record continues through the build-up to the Spanish Civil War, his abrupt flight, first to France, then England, and finally to the United States where the diaries end on May 6, 1939.

Graves' very first entry, on February 22, 1935 is typical. In addition to noting his purchase of the Posada, their residence in Deya, Mallorca, he is concerned about his financial responsibilities to his children back in England. Beyond their interest to literary



scholars, these diaries have value as social commentary, recording the effects of the Spanish Civil War that gradually engulfs Deya, forcing Graves and his circle to flee Mallorca on August 2, 1936 aboard the British destroyer HMS Grenville. His Deya friend Gelat, a local Republican politician and entrepreneur, gets caught in the machinery of the war, and the diary tracks news of his imprisonment and his family's anxiety. Among the 117 enclosures in the diaries, newspaper clippings record the Civil War's progress and copies of the letters and money Graves sent to support his former neighbour's family, many of them in exile.

At a time when many of Graves' contemporaries gave Hitler the benefit of the doubt, the diaries show a clear-sighted Graves recognizing the threat posed by German fascism as early as September 19, 1935. Tucked away among the day-to-day diary entries about writing and family and visitors and gardening, Graves steadily records, often in a single laconic line, news of the gathering Nazi storm.

Their dramatic flight from Mallorca in August 1936 precipitated concerns about his secretary and friend, Karl Goldschmidt, an Austrian Jew threatened with

repatriation when the group finally landed in France; the diary records Graves's strenuous efforts to secure Goldschmidt permanent status outside Hitler's Europe, including a meeting with future Canadian Prime Minister, Lester Pearson, a former comrade-in-arms from World War I, and in 1938, the High Commissioner at the Canadian Commission in London.

In England, Graves records encounters with some of the major public figures of the period. His old friend and mentor, T. E. Lawrence, moves through these pages, as does Basil Liddell Hart, the celebrated military historian and strategist. Graves also meets Winston Churchill in November 1936 to urge a more assertive British intervention in the Spanish Civil War.

But as rich as the diaries are in daily detail, the generic conventions of discretion Graves followed²—these are daily records rather than a journal intime—and are mute on subjective, affective matters, a silence that was to provoke acrimonious exchanges and critical controversies following the university's acquisition of the diaries. The first signs of trouble appeared when Graves refused access to the diaries to an "obsessed garrulous collector"³ in 1971, and followed

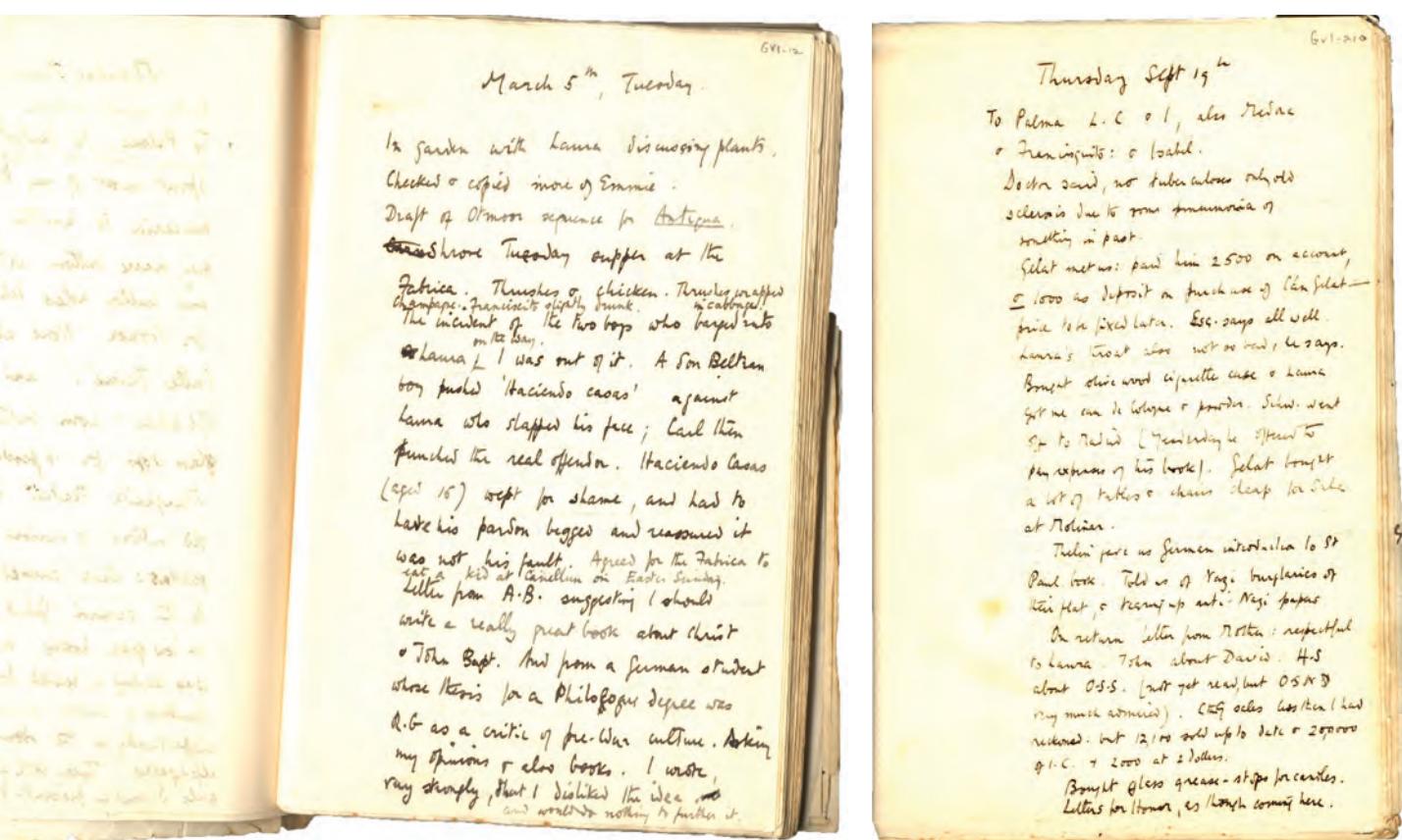
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Cover of Diary.
[SC050]

Robert Graves'
Signature. [SC050]

Diary Entry from
February 22, 1935.
[SC050]

FACING PAGE:
Photograph of
Graves in Krakow.
[SC050]



up with a letter to an acquaintance at the University of Victoria, poet and critic Robin Skelton (Letter, fonds, Nov. 10, 1971). Graves told Skelton the diaries had been sold in error when he was ill and he had not been consulted.

The unexpected re-appearance of the diaries confused other members of Graves' circle from the period. In 1975, in a special edition of *The Malahat Review*'s "A Gathering in Celebration of the Eightieth Birthday of Robert Graves," the University of Victoria published an inventory of the Graves Collection held by the University. Shortly afterwards, the library received a letter from Laura (Riding) Jackson's bibliographer, Alan Clark, requesting access to the diary and related materials. In May 1975, Laura (Riding) Jackson followed up with a letter that appears to question the status of these diaries:

As one who knew of the content of activity of all the years covered in the purported diaries

in thoroughly personal detail but know of no 'diary' records kept of any of that period by Mr. Graves... Not only was there no contemporary acquaintance of mine with any diary-keeping propensities of Mr. Graves: I first learned of the existence of a bunch of material, with 'letters from his children' tucked into it, from a report of an academic friend, living in Canada, who had seen a copy of the *Malahat Review*, with an account of the 'diaries' in it.

Her bibliographer, Alan Clark, confirms a correspondence with Laura (Riding) Jackson about the authenticity of these diaries in which she states very clearly that she knew nothing of his keeping such a diary "or any other matter of a logging kind during the period in question (Jackson)," but whatever Riding's doubts about the authenticity of these diaries in the 1970s, her biographer Elizabeth Friedmann confirmed in a personal letter that "...by the time she and

Diary Entry from
March 5, 1935.
[sc050]

Diary Entry from
September 19,
1935. Graves
expresses his
concern about
the Nazis. [sc050]



I discussed the Graves diary in the 1980s, she never questioned its authenticity."

These controversies, however, fueled rumours that the diaries were full of detailed, highly intimate information about the last years of Graves' association with Riding, rumours that gained momentum from the heated debates among scholars and critics about the extent of their collaboration during their years together.

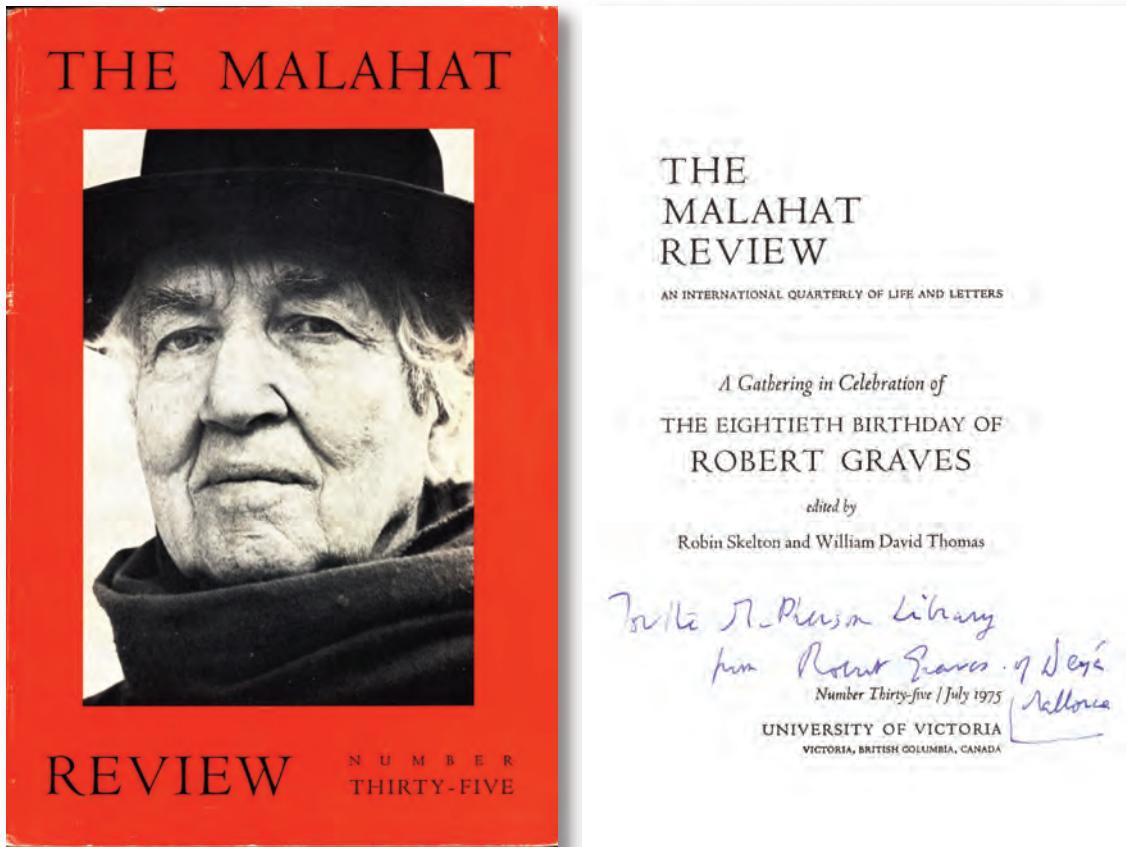
Consequently, in 2003, when researchers at the University of Victoria received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to produce a digital scholarly edition of the diaries, we took the opportunity to scrutinize the paratextual and material elements of the diaries to see what evidence the diaries themselves provided. Had the diaries been retrospectively falsified—as Riding seemed to have believed at one point—to bolster Graves' version of their life together? Was there any evidence from the diaries that Riding had

commissioned Graves to write them as a form of intimate surveillance?

Our examination of the documents revealed that Graves was an unusually diligent daily record-keeper, who maintained this daily practice through the geographic and personal upheavals that followed their flight from Deya. The only deviation from this pattern comes in the composition of the fascicules—the handmade, hand-bound booklets he used for his diaries. The plain white paper of the first year is replaced on August 2, 1936 by pale blue paper immediately following their flight from Mallorca. In the subsequent years, the diary paper changes from blue to cream, from onionskin to letter quality, during their various **demanagements**. In addition, the 12 entries preceding the dates of their flight (beginning July 20, 1936) show the pages had been heavily scored along the left margin, presumably to allow hasty

moves

Letter to Malahat Review. [SC050]



Cover of *The Malahat Review*.
[SC050]

Signed Copy to Library. For the McPherson Library from Robert Graves.
[SC050]

FACING PAGE:
Graves Diary Digital Project.
[SC050]

Cover of *Focus*.
[SC050]

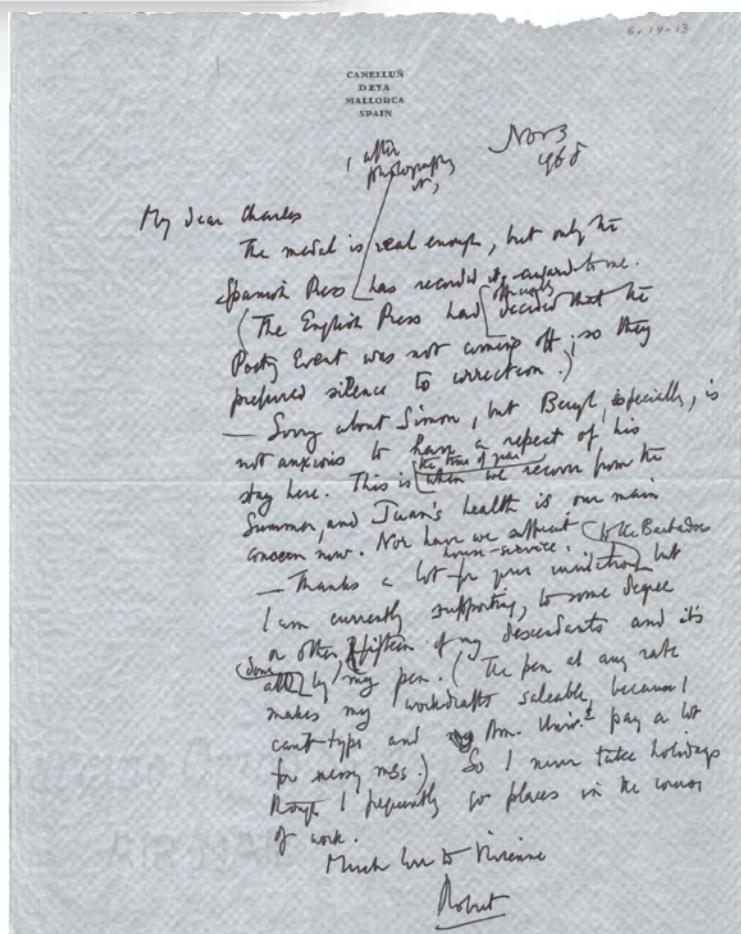
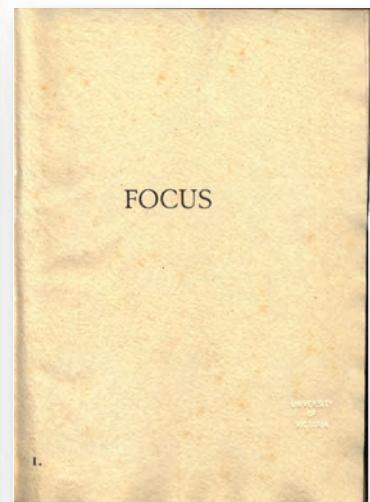
Letter to Son, Charles. [SC050]

destruction of material that might incriminate Graves himself or his friend Gelat in the eyes of Franco's security forces. This precaution, together with Graves' determination to retain and continue his daily record through all the travels and domestic moves of the following three years, suggests he valued the diaries at the time.

Finally, UVic researchers used topic modeling tools to investigate possible links between the diaries and other texts produced by Graves, Riding, and members of their entourage in the period covered by the diaries. Our efforts identified significant overlaps between the diaries and Graves' contributions to *Focus*, printed by Riding and Graves and circulated to members of their circle, many of whom had been visitors to Deya. The first issue of *Focus* had appeared in December 1934, little over a month before Graves began his diary, and his later writings for *Focus* indicate he mined these diaries assiduously for his subsequent *Focus* contributions, in some cases

transposing whole diary entries word-for-word. Since it is certain that Riding edited *Focus*, the persistent allegations about Riding's critical oversight of the Graves diaries may have arisen from a conflation of those diaries and the public *Focus* articles. *Focus* lasted for four issues, with the final issue appearing in December 1935. Graves continued to keep a daily record for several years after its usefulness as a source for the *Focus* letters had ended.

These post-*Focus* entries show little evidence of any major change in either the tone or the general content of the entries. The number of diary enclosures increases, however, indicating Graves had come to use the diaries as a form of storage for various documents associated with the entries, with memorabilia ranging from draft business letters to photographs to ticket stubs and programs. In the absence of ledgers or other bookkeeping records from the period, it is not unreasonable to infer that at least one of the diaries' uses was as a form of business record, regis-



tering the financial and commercial transactions associated with the business dealings of a successful professional writer.

Aemilia Laracuen became Robert Graves' lover in the 1960s; their personal letters were not made available to the public until 2003.

See Philippe Lejeune (Lejeune) for a discussion of diary conventions and constraints.

According to Seymour-Smith, the "obsessed garrulous ex-collector of Gravesiana" is Ellsworth Mason, who was the Head Librarian at Hofstra University and became friends with the University of Victoria Librarian, Dean Halliwell. He published a magazine called "Focus on Robert Graves" in the 1970's. He was writing an article on the Seizen Press for publication in The Private Library in Sept. 1971 and wrote to Mr. Halliwell asking whether we could make a complete microfilm of the diary. Halliwell agreed subject to Mason getting Graves' permission. Graves wrote to Mason that he refused permission and Mason conveyed the news to the University of Victoria (letter of Nov. 6, 1971).

Robert Graves
requests the pleasure of your company
on the occasion of his 80th. birthday
on Thursday, the 24th. of July 1975
at Canelluñ, Deyá, Mallorca
from 8-12 p.m.
R.S.V.P.



Invitation to
Graves' Birthday in
Spain. Graves
befriended Robin
Skelton, Editor of
The Malahat
Review. [SC050]

FACING PAGE:
Letter Written on
Scrap of Airmail
Envelope. [SC050]

Much love to
Dear gentle Guy

G 125-483

Just got lovely post

letter from you, Guy,

Emily, Edmund, Gabriel.

So you are packing love? —

but only in your mind? — like

St George — always in the saddle
never on his way'. Still... will
come, by submarine or speeder or even

I don't really like magicians

raising boys into the air. Boys

should do it naturally, as

this is at the age of 7 to

ungracious surprise. The only acceptable

magic is the magic of love: yours

Edmund's rubric is too acute for
me; but a ~~dangerous~~ ^{timid} heart.

Await your letter which
I may well forward.

A big kiss to Emily.

- R.