



La casa de  
Robert Graves

## ***Biography***

Robert Graves (1895-1985) English poet, novelist, critic, and classical scholar who carried on many of the formal traditions of English verse in a period of experimentation, is one of the great English literary figures of the Twentieth century and one of its most versatile and original writers.

His more than 120 books also include a notable historical novel, *I, Claudius* (1934); an autobiographical classic of World War I, *Good-Bye to All That* (1929); and erudite, controversial studies in mythology.

As a student at Charterhouse School, London, young Graves began to write poetry; he continued this while serving as a British officer at the western front during World War I, writing three books of verse during 1916-17. The horror of trench warfare was a crucial experience in his life: he was severely wounded in 1916 and remained deeply troubled by his war experiences for at least a decade. Graves's mental conflicts during the 1920s were exacerbated by an increasingly unhappy marriage to Nancy Nicholson, with whom he had four children, that ended in divorce. A new acceptance of his own nature, in which sexual love and dread seemed to exist in close proximity, appeared in his verse after he met Laura Riding, an American poet, who accompanied him to the island of Majorca, Spain, in 1929 and with whom he was associated for 13 years. Later he married Beryl Pritchard and had four more children.

The success of Graves's *Good-Bye to All That*, war memoirs notable for their unadorned grimness, enabled him to make his permanent home on Majorca, an island whose simplicity had not yet been altered by tourism. Graves's novel *I, Claudius* is an engaging first-person narrative purportedly written by the Roman emperor Claudius as he chronicles the personalities and machinations of the Julio-Claudian line during the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula. This work was followed by other historical novels dealing with ancient Mediterranean civilizations and including *Claudius the God* (1934), which extends Claudius' narrative to his own reign as emperor; *Count Belisarius* (1938), a sympathetic study of the great and martyred general of the Byzantine Empire; and *The Golden Fleece* (1944; U.S. title *Hercules, My Shipmate*). Graves's researches for *The Golden Fleece* led him into a wide-ranging study of myths and to what was his most controversial scholarly work, *The White Goddess; A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1948). In it the author argues the existence of an all-important religion, rooted in the remote past but continuing into the Christian Era, based on the worship of a goddess.

Graves began before 1914 as a typical Georgian poet, but his war experiences and the difficulties of his personal life gave his later poetry a much deeper and more painful note. He remained a traditionalist rather than a modernist, however, in his emphasis on meter and clear meaning in his verse. Graves's sad love poems are regarded as the finest produced in the English language during the 20th century, along with those of W.B.Yeats.

Graves was elected professor of poetry at the University of Oxford in 1961 and served there until 1966. His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1938, with revisions in 1948, 1955, 1959, 1965, and 1975. His own later views on poetry can be found in *The Crowning Privilege* (1955) and *Oxford Addresses on Poetry*.

He died in his house in Deià, Mallorca, in 1985, and is buried in a simple grave in the picturesque cemetery on the hill next to the church.