

ALSO BY ROBERT GRAVES

I, Claudius

Count Belisarius

King Jesus

Poems 1938–1945

Complete Short Stories
(Edited by Lucia Graves)

THE WHITE GODDESS

A HISTORICAL GRAMMAR
OF POETIC MYTH

ROBERT
GRAVES

EDITED BY GREVEL LINDOP

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One most interesting sequence can be built up from lines 29-32, 36-37 and 234-237:

*Indifferent bards pretend,
They pretend a monstrous beast,
With a hundred heads,
A spotted crested snake,*

*A toad having on his thighs
A hundred claws,*

*With a golden jewel set in gold
I am enriched;
And indulged in pleasure
By the oppressive toil of the goldsmith.*

Since Gwion identifies himself with these bards, they are, I think, described as 'indifferent' by way of irony. The hundred-headed serpent watching over the jewelled Garden of the Hesperides, and the hundred-clawed toad wearing a precious jewel in his head (mentioned by Shakespeare's Duke Senior) both belonged to the ancient toadstool mysteries, of which Gwion seems to have been an adept. The European mysteries are less fully explored than their Mexican counterpart; but Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Wasson and Professor Roger Heim have shown that the pre-Columbian Toadstool-god Tlalóc, represented as a toad with a serpent head-dress, has for thousands of years presided at the communal eating of the hallucigenic toadstool *psilocybe*: a feast that gives visions of transcendental beauty. Tlalóc's European counterpart, Dionysus, shares too many of his mythical attributes for coincidence: they must be versions of the same deity; though at what period the cultural contact took place between the Old World and the New is debatable.

In my foreword to a revised edition of *The Greek Myths*, I suggest that a secret Dionysiac mushroom cult was borrowed from the native Pelasgians by the Achaeans of Argos. Dionysus's Centaurs, Satyrs and Maenads, it seems, ritually ate a spotted toadstool called 'fly-cap' (*amanita muscaria*), which gave them enormous muscular strength, erotic power, delirious visions, and the gift of prophecy. Partakers in the Eleusinian, Orphic and other mysteries may also have known the *panaeolus papilionaceus*, a small dung-mushroom still used by Portuguese witches, and similar in effect to mescaline. In lines 234-237, Gwion implies that a single gem can enlarge itself under the influence of 'the toad' or 'the serpent' into a whole treasury of jewels. His claim to be as learned as Math and to know myriads of secrets may also belong to the toad-serpent sequence; at any rate, *psilocybe* gives a sense of universal illumination, as I can attest from my own experience of it. 'The light whose name is Splendour' may refer to this brilliance of vision, rather than to the Sun.

The *Book of Taliesin* contains several similar medleys or poems awaiting resurrection: a most interesting task, but one that must wait until the texts are established and properly translated. The work that I have done here is not offered as in any sense final.

CÂD GODDEU
'The Battle of the Trees'

*The tops of the beech tree
Have sprouted of late,
Are changed and renewed
From their withered state.*

*When the beech prospers,
Though spells and litanies
The oak tops entangle,
There is hope for trees.*

*I have plundered the fern,
Through all secrets I spy,
Old Math ap Mathonwy
Knew no more than I.*

*For with nine sorts of faculty
God has gifted me:
I am fruit of fruits gathered
From nine sorts of tree —*

*Plum, quince, whortle, mulberry,
Raspberry, pear,
Black cherry and white
With the sorb in me share.*

*From my seat at Fefynedd,
A city that is strong,
I watched the trees and green things
Hastening along.*

*Retreating from happiness
They would fain be set
In forms of the chief letters
Of the alphabet.*

*Wayfarers wondered,
Warriors were dismayed
At renewal of conflicts
Such as Gwydion made;*

Centaurs under their sacred king Cheiron welcomed Achaean aid against their enemies the Lapiths, of Northern Thessaly. The word 'Cheiron' is apparently connected with the Greek *cheir*, a hand, and 'Centaurs' with *centron*, a goat. In my essay *What Food the Centaurs Ate*, I suggest that they intoxicated themselves by eating 'fly-cap' (*amanita muscaria*), the hundred-clawed toad, an example of which appears, carved on an Etruscan mirror, at the feet of their ancestor Ixion. Were the Hecatoncheiroi the Centaurs of mountainous Magnesia, whose friendship was strategically necessary to the Achaean pastoralists of Thessaly and Boeotia? The Centaurs' mother goddess was called, in Greek, Leucothea, 'the White Goddess', but the Centaurs themselves called her Ino or Plastene, and her rock-cut image is still shown near the ancient pinnacle-town of Tantalus; she had also become the 'mother' of Melicertes, or Hercules Melkarth, the god of earlier semi-Semitic invaders.

The Greeks claimed to remember the date of Zeus's victory in alliance with the Hecatoncheiroi over the Titans of Thessaly: the well-informed Tatian quotes a calculation by the first-century AD historian Thallus,¹ that it took place 322 years before the ten-year siege of Troy. Since the fall of Troy was then confidently dated at 1183 BC, the answer is 1505 BC. If this date is more or less accurate² the legend probably refers to an extension of Achaean power in Thessaly at the expense of Pelasgian tribes, who were driven off to the north. The story of the Gigantomachia, the fight of the Olympian gods with the giants, probably refers to a similar but much later occasion, when the Greeks found it necessary to subdue the warlike Magnesians in their fastnesses of Pelion and Ossa – apparently because of trouble caused by their exogamic practices which conflicted with the Olympian patriarchal theory and gave them an undeserved reputation as sexual maniacs; it also records Hercules's charm against the nightmare.

The Achaeans became Cretanized between the seventeenth and fifteenth centuries in the Late Minoan Age, which in Greece is called the Mycenaean, after Mycenae, the capital city of the Atreus dynasty. The Aeolian Greeks invaded Thessaly from the north and were further able to occupy Boeotia and the Western Peloponnese. They settled down amicably with the Achaean Danaans and became known as the Minyans. It is likely that both nations took part in the sack of Cnossos about the year

¹ Thallus gives the earliest historical record of the Crucifixion.

² A. R. Burn in his *Minoans, Philistines and Greeks* suggests that all traditional dates before 500 BC should be reduced to five-sixths of their distance from that date, since the Greeks reckoned three generations to a century, when four would be nearer the mark. However, Walter Leaf approves of 1183 BC as the date of the Fall of Troy, because the curse of one thousand years that had fallen on the city of Ajax in punishment for his rape of the Trojan priestess Cassandra was lifted about 183 BC. The date now favoured by most archaeologists is 1230 BC.

1400, which ended Cretan sea-power. The reduction of Crete, by now become largely Greek-speaking, resulted in a great expansion of Mycenaean power: conquests in Asia Minor, Phoenicia, Libya and the Aegean islands. About the year 1250 BC a distinction arose between the Achaean Danaans and other less civilized Achaeans from North-western Greece who invaded the Peloponnese, founded a new patriarchal dynasty, repudiated the sovereignty of the Great Goddess, and instituted the familiar Olympian pantheon, ruled over by Zeus, in which gods and goddesses were equally represented. Myths of Zeus's quarrels with his wife Hera (a name of the Great Goddess), with his brother Poseidon, and with Apollo of Delphi, suggest that the religious revolution was at first strongly resisted by the Danaans and Pelasgians. But a united Greece captured Troy, at the entrance to the Dardanelles, a city which had taken toll of their commerce with the Black Sea and the East. A generation after the fall of Troy, another Indo-European horde pressed down into Asia Minor and Europe – among them the Dorians who invaded Greece, killing, sacking and burning – and a great tide of fugitives was let loose in all directions.

Thus we may, without historical qualms, identify Danu of the Tuatha dé Danaan, who were Bronze Age Pelasgians expelled from Greece in the middle of the second millennium, with the pre-Achaean Goddess Danaë of Argos. Her power extended to Thessaly, and she mothered the early Achaean dynasty called the House of Perseus (more correctly *Pterseus*, 'the destroyer'); but by Homer's time Danaë was masculinized into 'Danaus, son of Belus', who was said to have brought his 'daughters' to Greece from Libya by way of Egypt, Syria and Rhodes. The names of the three daughters, Linda, Cameira and Ialysa, are evidently titles of the Goddess, who also figures as 'Lamia, daughter of Belus, a Libyan Queen'. In the well-known legend of the massacre of the sons of Aegyptus on their wedding night the number of these daughters of Danaus, or Danaids, is enlarged from three to fifty, probably because that was the regular number of priestesses in the Argive and Elian colleges of the Mother-goddess cult. The original Danaans may well have come up to the Aegean from Lake Tritonis in Libya (now a salt marsh), by the route given in the legend, though it is unlikely that they were so called until they reached Syria. That the Cottians, who came to Northern Greece from the Black Sea by way of Phrygia and Thrace, were also reckoned as Danaans, proves that they arrived there before the Aeolians, who were not so reckoned. A. B. Cook in his *Zeus* gives strong reasons for believing that the Graeco-Libyans and the Thraco-Phrygians were related, and that both tribal groups had relatives among the early Cretans.

We may further identify Danu with the Mother-goddess of the Aegean 'Danuna', a people who about the year 1200 BC, according to contemporary Egyptian inscriptions, invaded Northern Syria in company with the

the berries are Christ's blood. In North Wales as a child I was warned merely that they were poisonous. In Devonshire the taboo is only on eating blackberries after the last day of September, when 'the Devil enters into them'; which substantiates my theory that the blackberry was a popular substitute for Muin in the West Country.) The vine was sacred to the Thracian Dionysus, and to Osiris, and a golden vine was one of the principal ornaments of the Temple of Jerusalem. It is the tree of joy, exhilaration and wrath. The month extends from September 2nd to September 29th and includes the autumn equinox.

G FOR GORT

The eleventh tree is the ivy in its flowering season. October was the season of the Bacchanal revels of Thrace and Thessaly in which the intoxicated Bassarids rushed wildly about on the mountains, waving the fir-branches of Queen Artemis (or Ariadne) spirally wreathed with ivy – the yellow-berried sort – in honour of Dionysus (the autumnal Dionysus, who must be distinguished from the Dionysus of the Winter Solstice who is really a Hercules), and with a roebuck tattooed on their right arms above the elbow. They tore fawns, kids, children and even men to pieces in their ecstasy. The ivy was sacred to Osiris as well as to Dionysus. Vine and ivy come next to each other at the turn of the year, and are jointly dedicated to resurrection, presumably because they are the only two trees in the Beth-Luis-Nion that grow spirally. The vine also symbolizes resurrection because its strength is preserved in the wine. In England the ivy-bush has always been the sign of the wine-tavern; hence the proverb 'Good wine needs no bush', and ivy-ale, a highly intoxicating mediaeval drink, is still brewed at Trinity College, Oxford, in memory of a Trinity student murdered by Balliol men. It is likely that the Bassarids' tipples were 'spruce-ale', brewed from the sap of silver-fir and laced with ivy; they may also have chewed ivy-leaves for their toxic effect. Yet the main Maenad intoxicant will have been *amanita muscaria*, the red toadstool with white spots, that alone could supply the necessary muscular strength. Here we may reconsider Phoroneus, the Spring-Dionysus, inventor of fire. He built the city of Argos, the emblem of which, according to Apollodorus, was a toad; and Mycenae, the main fortress of Argolis, was so called, according to Pausanias, because Perseus, a convert to Dionysus worship, found a toadstool growing on the site. Dionysus had two feasts – the Spring *Anthesterion*, or 'Flower-uprising'; and the autumn *Mysterion*, which probably means 'uprising of toadstools' (*mykosterion*) known as *Ambrosia* ('food of the gods'). Was Phoroneus also the discoverer of a divine fire resident in the toadstool, and therefore Phryneus ('toad being') as well as Fearinus ('Spring being')? The *amanita muscaria*, though not a tree, grows under a tree: always a birch northward from Thrace and Celtic

countries to the Arctic Circle; but under a fir or pine southward from Greece and Palestine to the Equator. In the North it is scarlet; in the South, fox-coloured. And does this explain the precedence given to the silver-fir among the vowels as A, and the birch among the consonants as B? Does it add a further note to 'Christ son of Alpha'?

(The rivalry mentioned in mediaeval English carols between holly and ivy is not, as one might expect, between the tree of murder and the tree of resurrection, between Typhon-Set and Dionysus-Osiris; instead it represents the domestic war of the sexes. The explanation seems to be that in parts of England the last harvest sheaf to be carted in any parish was bound around with Osirian ivy and called the Harvest May, the Harvest Bride, or the Ivy Girl: whichever farmer was latest with his harvesting was given the Ivy Girl as his penalty, an omen of ill luck until the following year. Thus the ivy came to mean a carline, or shrewish wife, a simile confirmed by the strangling of trees by ivy. But ivy and holly were both associated with the Saturnalia, holly being Saturn's club, ivy being the nest of the Gold Crest Wren, his bird; on Yule morning, the last of his merry reign, the first foot over the threshold had to be that of Saturn's representative, a dark man, called the Holly Boy, and elaborate precautions were taken to keep women out of the way. Thus Ivy Girl and Holly Boy became opposed; which gave rise to the Yule custom in which 'holly boys' and 'ivy girls' contended in a game of forfeits for precedence, and sang songs, mainly satirical, against each other.)

The ivy month extends from September 30th to October 27th.

P FOR PEITH, OR NG FOR NGETAL

The twelfth tree given in O'Flaherty's list is Peith, the whitten, or guelder-rose, or water-elder, an appropriate introduction to the last month which is the true elder. But Peith is not the original letter; it is a Brythonic substitute for the original letter NG, which was of no literary use to the Brythons, or (for that matter) to the Goidels, but which formed part of the original series. The NG tree was the *Ngetal*, or reed, which becomes ready for cutting in November. The canna-reed, which grows from a thick root like a tree, was an ancient symbol of royalty in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Pharaohs used reed sceptres (hence Egypt is satirized by the prophet Isaiah as a 'bruised reed') and a royal reed was put into Jesus's hand when he was attired in scarlet. It is the tree from which arrows were cut, and therefore appropriate to Pharaoh as a living Sun-god who shot off his arrows in every direction as a symbol of sovereignty. The number twelve has the sense of established power, confirmed by the Irish use of reeds in thatching: a house is not an established house until the roof is on. The month extends from October 28th to November 24th.

if we can accept A. M. Hocart's conclusion that the coronation ceremony throughout the ancient world typified the marriage of the Sun King to the Earth Queen, his death as a member of his former tribe and his re-birth with a new name into that of his Queen, then the ritual on which all these myths are based must have included a mock-assassination of the king in the course of the bath-ceremony; which is proved by the victims offered in the king's stead in many forms of the ritual known to us. The confused elements in the myth of Hephaestus, who was married to the Love-goddess and deceived by her, and lamed by suddenly being thrown down from Olympus by the Goddess Hera, and mocked by the whole company of Heaven, compose another variant of the same ritual. Originally the king died violently as soon as he had coupled with the queen; as the drone dies after coupling with the queen-bee. Later, emasculation and laming were substituted for death; later still, circumcision was substituted for emasculation and the wearing of buskins for laming.

Once we know that the sacred king was ritually lamed in a way that obliged him to swagger or lurch on high heels, we understand at last two or three hitherto mysterious ancient icons. Tantalus, suspended over the water with a fruit-branch above his head and the water always slipping away is evidently being lamed in Llew Llaw fashion: originally his hair is tied to the branch, one foot is on the bank, the other rests on something in the water – perhaps a large boat-shaped basin – that slips away. Tantalus is a perfect type of Dionysus: he was married to Eurynassa (another form of Eurynome) a Moon-goddess; he was thrown down from Mount Sipylus, in Pelasgian Lydia, where he was afterwards buried and had a hero shrine; he was Pelops's cannibalistic father; he helped to steal a Dog from a Cretan cave; and from his name derive three other Greek words meaning, like *saleuein*, from which *saleuma* is formed, 'to swagger or lurch in one's gait': *tantaloicin*, *tantaleuein* and, by a metathesis, *talantoein*.

Like Ixion and Salmoneus, Tantalus belonged to the old religion superseded by Olympianism, and the Olympian priests have deliberately misinterpreted the icons in favour of Father Zeus by presenting him as an odious criminal. Tantalus's crime, the mythographers explain, was that, having been privileged to eat ambrosia, the food of the gods, with the Olympians, he later invited commoners to try it. *Ambrosia* was the name of Dionysus's autumnal feast in which, I suggest, the intoxicant toadstool once supplied his votaries with a divine frenzy; and in my *What Food the Centaurs Ate*, I show that the ingredients given by Classical grammarians for ambrosia, nectar, and *kekkyon* (Demeter's drink at Eleusis) represent a food-ogham – their initial letters all spell out forms of a Greek word for 'mushroom'. The story of Tantalus's crime may have been told when wine displaced toadstools at the Maenad revels, and a toadstool – perhaps not *amanita muscaria*, but the milder, more entrancing *panaeolus papilionaceus* – was eaten by adepts at the Eleusinian, Samothracian and Cretan

Mysteries, who became as gods by virtue of the transcendental visions it supplied.

However the dislocation may have been produced – and it is likely that still another method was practised on a hill-top, not beside a river – there was a taboo in Canaan on eating the flesh around the thigh-bone, as is expressly stated in *Genesis* in the story of Jacob's wrestling at Peniel. Robertson-Smith rightly connects this taboo with the practice, common to all Mediterranean countries, of dedicating the thigh-bones of all sacrificial beasts, and the parts about them, to the gods: they were burned first and then the rest of the beast was eaten by the worshippers. But the anthropological rule 'No taboo without its relaxation' applies here. In primitive times the flesh-covered thighbone of the dead king must have been eaten by his comrades. This practice was until recently followed, as Mgr. Terhoorst, a Roman Catholic missionary records, by the younger warriors of the Central African Bantu tribe of Bagiushu among whom he worked. The flesh was eaten on the death of their Old Man, or when the chief of an enemy tribe was killed in battle. Mgr. Terhoorst states that this was done to inherit the courage of the dead man which was held to reside in the thigh, and that the rest of the body was not touched. The Bagiushu, who file their front teeth into a triangular shape, are not cannibalistic on other occasions.

In my *King Jesus* I suggest that the Hebrew tradition found in the *Talmud Babli Sanhedrin* and the *Tol' Doth Yeshu*, that Jesus was lamed while attempting to fly, refers to a secret Coronation ceremony on Mount Tabor, where he became the new Israel after being ritually lamed in a wrestling match. This tradition is supported by Gospel evidence which I adduce, and by a remark of Jerome's that Jesus was deformed. Mount Tabor was one of Jehovah's chief shrines. Tabor is named after Atabyrius, the son of Eurynome and grandson of Proteus, as the Septuagint recognized, and we know a good deal about this god, who also had a shrine built to him on Mount Atabyria in Rhodes by one 'Althacamenes the Cretan'. Althacamenes means 'Mindful of the Goddess Althaea' and Althaea ('she who makes grow') was another name for Atabyrius's mother Eurynome, the Moon-goddess of the Orphics. The marshmallow – in Welsh *hocys bendigaid* the holy mallow – was Althaea's flower, and she loved Dionysus the Vine-god. She became the mother by him of Deianeira, the same Deianeira who played the part of Blodeuwedd to Hercules of Oeta. Atabyrius, being one of the Cretan Telchines, had the power, like Dionysus or Proteus, to transform himself into any shape; and in his Rhodian shrine brazen bulls were dedicated to him which bellowed whenever anything extraordinary was about to happen – the same sort of brazen bull that was made by Daedalus for King Minos of Crete. And we know that Atabyrius was the god, worshipped as a golden calf, whom Israel credited with having brought them out of Egypt. But the *byrius* termina-

north: he really fetched it from the south, perhaps from as far south as Egyptian Thebes where it still grew with oaks and persea-trees in the time of Pliny – just as the ‘Gorgon’ whom Perseus killed during his visit to the ass-sacrificing Hyperboreans was the southern Goddess Neith of Libya. This was not Hercules the oak-hero, but the other Hercules, the phallic thumb, leader of the five Dactyls, who according to the tradition that Pausanias found at Elis brought such an abundance of wild-olive from Hyperboraea that, after he had crowned the victor of the foot-race run by his brothers, they all slept on heaps of its fresh leaves. Pausanias, though he names the competitors, does not say who won; but it was obviously Paeonius the forefinger, which always comes in first when you run your fingers on the table and make them race, for the *paeon* or *paeon* was the song of victory. Moreover, Pausanias says that Zeus wrestled with Cronos on this occasion, and beat him; Zeus is the god of the forefinger, and Cronos the god of the middle, or fool’s finger. The Dactyl who came in second in the race was evidently Epimedes, ‘he who thinks too late’, the fool; for Pausanias gives the names in this order: Hercules, Paeonius, Epimedes, Jasius and Idas.

The wild olive, then, was the crown of Paeonius the forefinger: which means that the vowel of the forefinger, namely O, which is expressed by the gorse *Onn* in the Beth-Luis-Nion, was expressed by the wild olive in the Greek tree alphabet. This explains the use of olive at the Spring festival in the ancient world, which continues in Spain at the ‘Ramos’ (boughs) festival; and Hercules’s olive-wood club – the Sun first arms himself at the Spring equinox; and the olive-leaf in the bill of Noah’s dove which symbolizes the drying up of the winter floods by the Spring Sun. It also explains Paeonius as a title of Apollo Helios the god of the young Sun, which however he seems to have derived from the Goddess Athene Paeonia who first brought the olive to Athens; and the name of the peony, *paeonia*, a Mediterranean wild flower which blooms only at the Spring solstice and quickly sheds its petals.

Spenser’s White Goddess is the Arthurian ‘Lady of the Lake’, also called ‘the White Serpent’, ‘Nimue’, and ‘Vivien’, whom Professor Rhys in his *Arthurian Legend* identifies with Rhiannon. She is mistress of Merlin (Merddin) and treacherously entombs him in his magic cave when, as Llew Llaw to Blodeuwedd, or Samson to Delilah, or Curoi to Blathnat, he has revealed some of his secrets to her. However, in the earliest Welsh account, the *Dialogue of Gwenddydd and Merddin*, she tells him to arise from his prison and ‘open the Books of Inspiration without fear’. In this dialogue she calls him ‘twin-brother’ which reveals her as Olwen, and she is also styled *Gwenddydd wen adlam Cerddeu*, ‘White Lady of Day, refuge of poems’, which proves her to be the Muse, Cardea-Cerridwen, who inspires *cerddeu*, ‘poems’, in Greek, *cerdeia*.

‘What is inspiration?’ is a question that is continually asked. The derivation of the word supplies two related answers. ‘Inspiration’ may be the breathing-in by the poet of fumes from an intoxicating cauldron, the *Awen* of the cauldron of Cerridwen, containing probably a mash of barley, acorns, honey, bull’s blood and such sacred herbs as ivy, hellebore¹ and laurel, or mephitic fumes from an underground vent as at Delphi, or the fumes that rise to the nostrils when toadstools are chewed. These fumes induce the paranoiac trance in which time is suspended, though the mind remains active and can relate its proleptic or analeptic apprehensions in verse. But ‘inspiration’ may also refer to the inducement of the same poetic condition by the act of listening to the wind, the messenger of the Goddess Cardea, in a sacred grove. At Dodona poetic oracles were listened for in the oak-grove, and the prophetic trance was perhaps induced in the black-dove priestesses who first controlled the oracle by the chewing of acorns; at any rate, a scholiast on Lucan notes that this method was used among the Gallic Druids. In Canaan the prime oracular tree was the acacia – the ‘burning bush’ discussed in Chapter Fifteen – and there is a reference to this sort of inspiration in *1 Chronicles, XIV, 15*:

When thou hearest the sound of marching in the tops of the mulberry trees, then bestir thyself.

Here, ‘mulberry trees’ should be ‘acacias’. Jehovah himself was in the wind, and the context – David’s assault on the Philistines from Gibeon to Gaza – shows that it blew from the North. This story dates from a time when Jehovah was not yet a transcendental God but lived, like Boreas, in a mountain to the far north; he was, in fact, the white bull-god Baal Zephon (‘Lord of the North’) who had borrowed his title from his Goddess Mother Baaltis Zapuna, a name attested in an inscription from Goshen where the tribe of Joseph was once settled. The Canaanites worshipped him as King of the Northern Otherworld and the Philistines of Ekron had taken over the cult; he was a god of prophecy and fertility. Another of his titles was Baal-Zebul, ‘the Lord of the Mansion [of the North]’ which named the tribe of Zebulon: they worshipped him on Mount Tabor. When King Ahaziah of Israel consulted his oracle at Ekron (*2 Kings, I, 1-4*) he earned Elijah’s reproach for not consulting the native Israelite oracle, presumably on Tabor. I suspect that Baal Zabul was an autumnal Dionysus, whose devotees intoxicated themselves on *amanita muscaria*, which still grows there; the Biblical name for these toadstools being either ‘ermrods’ or ‘little foxes’.

By the time of Jesus, who was accused of traffic with Beelzebub, the Kingdoms of Israel and Philistia had long been suppressed and the shrines

¹ This perhaps means *Helle-bora*, ‘the food of the Goddess Helle’. Helle was the Pelasgian goddess who gave her name to the Hellespont.

of Ekron and Tabor destroyed; and Baal-Zebul's functions having been taken over by the archangel Gabriel, he had declined to a mere devil mockingly called Baal-Zebub, 'Lord of Flies'. Yet the Levite butchers continued the old ritual of turning the victim's head to the north when they sacrificed.

The acacia is still a sacred tree in Arabia Deserta and anyone who even breaks off a twig is expected to die within the year. The common Classical icon of the Muse whispering in a poet's ear refers to tree-top inspiration: the Muse is the *dryad* (oak-fairy), or *mēlia* (ash-fairy), or *mēlia* (quince-fairy), or *caryatid* (nut-fairy), or *hamadryad* (wood-fairy in general), or *heliconian* (fairy of Mount Helicon, which took its name as much from *helicē*, the willow-tree sacred to poets, as from the stream which spiralled round it).

Nowadays poets seldom use these artificial aids to inspiration, though the sound of wind in the willows or in a plantation of forest-trees still exercises a strangely potent influence on their minds; and 'inspiration' is therefore applied to any means whatsoever by which the poetic trance is induced. But a good many of the charlatans or weaklings resort to automatic writing and spiritism. The ancient Hebrew distinction between legitimate and illegitimate prophecy – 'prophecy' meaning inspired poetry, in which future events are not necessarily, but usually, foretold – has much to recommend it. If a prophet went into a trance and was afterwards unconscious of what he had been babbling, that was illegitimate; but if he remained in possession of his critical faculties throughout the trance and afterwards, that was legitimate. His powers were heightened by the 'spirit of prophecy', so that his words crystallized immense experience into a single poetic jewel; but he was, by the grace of God, the sturdy author and regulator of this achievement. The spiritistic medium, on the other hand, whose soul momentarily absented itself so that demonic principalities and powers might occupy his body and speak pipingly through his mouth was no prophet and was 'cut off from the congregation' if it was found that he had deliberately induced the trance. The ban was presumably extended to automatic writing.

Chapter Twenty-Five

WAR IN HEAVEN

Must poetry necessarily be original? According to the Apollonian, or Classical, theory it need not be, since the test of a good poet is his ability to express time-proved sentiments in time-honoured forms with greater fluency, charm, sonorousness and learning than his rivals; these, at least, are the qualities that win a man a bardic Chair. Apollonian poetry is essentially court-poetry, written to uphold the authority delegated to poets by the King (regarded as a *Roi Soleil*, Apollo's vice-regent) on the understanding that they celebrate and perpetuate his magnificence and terror. They therefore use old-fashioned diction, formal ornament, and regular, sober, well-polished metre, as a means of upholding the dignity of their office; and make frequent eulogistic references to ancestral events and institutions. There is an extraordinary sameness in their eulogies: the Aztecs flattered their patriarchal Inca as 'a well-fed hawk, always ready for war' which was a phrase worked to death by the early mediaeval Welsh bards.

A Classical technique such as was perfected by these bards, or by the French poets of the Louis XIV period, or by the English poets of the early eighteenth-century Augustan Age is a sure sign of political stability based on force of arms; and to be original in such an age is to be either a disloyal subject or a vagrant.

The Augustan Age was so called because the poets were celebrating the same renewal of firm central government after the troubles leading to the execution of one king and the banishment of another, as the Latin poets (under orders from Maecenas, Minister of Propaganda and the Arts) had celebrated after Augustus's triumph at the close of the Roman Civil Wars. The new poetic technique was based partly on contemporary French practice – the 'Golden Age' of French literature had just begun – partly on that of the 'Golden Age' of Latin. The fashionable ten-or-twelve-syllabled iambic couplet, well-balanced and heavily packed with antithetical wit, was French. The use of 'poetical periphrasis' as a formal ornament was Latin: the poet was expected to refer, for instance, to the sea as the