R.B. Cunninghame Graham: The Writings

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R.B. Cunninghame Graham's writings start in the second half of his life and draw from all the experiences of the first half, so to get a sense of his source material, here's a summary.

Graham's life (1870-1936) spans two centuries, from Victoria's Empire to Modernism and the Scottish Renaissance. His contemporaries included Ivan Turgenev (1818-83), William Morris (1834-96), Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-94), Guy de Maupassant (1850-93), George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), John Buchan (1875-1940), James Joyce (1882-1941), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), Neil Gunn (1891-1973), Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978), and Lewis Grassic Gibbon (1901-35).

The life (in five parts)

Part 1: 1852-1870. Childhood and youth. Born in London, he grows up in Scotland at Gartmore, near Stirling, 'an anchor point': his writing shows that he knew Scots as well as English, though he went to boarding school at Harrow. His father was declared insane in 1866. The family was broke. He saw it as his mission to restore the family fortune.

Part 2: 1870-1884: In his 20s, he travels. In South America: Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, Paraguay. He is the companion of gauchos, learns languages (Spanish, Guarani, Portuguese), becomes an expert horseman. He was back in London in 1872 then set out again: Nova Scotia, the Basque Country. South America again, Iceland, around the West Coast of Africa, South America again, Spain, then to Paris, France. He met and married Gabriela. Then there was London, Spain again, then America again, in Texas, New Orleans, travelling with Gabriela from San Antonio 600 miles by mule-drawn wagon train carrying cotton to San Luis de Potosi, Mexico. He went back to Texas again, to South America again, to Texas, then France, then Spain. Then he inherited Gartmore and returned to Scotland.

Part 3: 1884-1894: In his 30s, it's politics. He's a Liberal Party socialist parliamentarian in London, helps found the Labour Party with Keir Hardie (Scottish Labour Party, 1888; Independent Labour Party, 1892; Labour Party, 1906). His key propositions included land reform, free education, local self-government, women's rights, home rule for Ireland and Scotland, radical reform of British foreign policy, the abolition of the House of Lords and the establishment of workers' rights, hours and pay (he visited the miners in the pits with Keir Hardie). He takes part in the Bloody Sunday demonstrations in Trafalgar Square, is batoned by police, tried and imprisoned in Pentonville. He takes up the cause of the Native American Indians. Travels to Spain (1891), tries mining. Then to Morocco, attempting to reach

Taroudant, disguised as a sharif, is captured and held captive by the Caid. Returns to London.

Part 4: 1894-1927: In his 40s and 50s, he's a writer. From 1899-1936 he publishes more than 25 books. 'I am a man of action and have passed most of my life outdoors…I am really, *pas de blague*, extremely diffident of all I write.' His friend Joseph Conrad writes to him: 'When I think of you, I feel as though I have lived all my life in a dark hole without seeing or knowing anything.' Forced to sell Gartmore in 1900, he and Gabriela base themselves in different properties in London, Scotland and France. Gabriela dies aged 48 in 1906, and Graham digs her grave on Inchmahome island in the Lake of Menteith by Gartmore, and has a bronze plaque placed on the ruined priory wall above it, with the inscription: 'Los Muertos Abren Los Ojos A Los Que Viven'. In 1915, he travels to Uruguay to buy horses for the war, knowing they will be slaughtered at the front.

Part 5: 1927-1936: In his 60s and 70s, he devotes himself to Scotland's independence. He helps found the Scottish Home Rule Association with Keir Hardie (1886), which joined the Scottish National League (founded 1920), the Glasgow University Student Nationalist Association (founded 1927), to form the National Party of Scotland (he was its President, in 1928), and then the Scottish National Party (and he was its President, in 1934). In 1936, he died in Buenos Aires, his body was returned to Scotland and is buried beside Gabriela. On his gravestone there is no cross, but his brand mark.

The Writings

Two observations seem especially pertinent to Graham's writings, as they arise from the experiences of his life and his political thought and actions. James Jauncey notes: 'Robert grasped only too well that which eludes so many politicians: how the cultural and political identities of a nation are deeply intertwined.' And Bertolt Brecht once said, 'Bourgeois philosophers make a distinction between the active man and the reflective man. The thinking man draws no such distinction.' (As quoted in Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art, and His Times* (London: Calder & Boyers, 1970), p.237.)

His first book is local, ***Notes on the District of Menteith: For Tourists and Others*** (1895), a study of the place, in Stirlingshire, its liminality, its inherent mistiness and mysteriousness, its character and its characters, older generations, men about to die off and disappear. Complete with detailed fold-out map and photographs, the writing is topographical but also evocative. Graham's Menteith is the crossing-place of various Borderlands, of language varieties, the Scots of locals, the Gaelic of Highlanders just to the north-west, making their occasional incursions, and the English of the landed classes. The chapter-titles suggest its range of approach: 'Descriptive', 'Historical', 'Some Reflections in the Incontinence of Kings'. 'Atavism',

'Traditional' and 'Pantheistic'. Graham catches the spirit of the place and the actuality of the people who once lived in it, their conditions, there and then, specific in geography and time.

Then comes a collaboration with his wife Gabriela, *Father Archangel of Scotland* (1896). She's a fascinating writer herself, was a friend of Oscar Wilde and W.B. Yeats, published a biography of Teresa of Avila, ***Santa Teresa: Her Life and Times*** (1894), and, posthumously, a book of poems, ***Rhymes from a World Unknown*** (1908), and a book of stories and sketches of her own, ***The Christ of the Toro*** (1908). *Father Archangel* gathers four items by Gabriela and nine by Graham, including one of the best, 'A Jesuit'. This tells of a Jesuit priest coming on board a boat at a port in the South American jungle and travelling upriver. The forest, the river, the crewmen and passengers, are all described closely, circling around, then centring on the Jesuit, who finally tells his own story. He's the last survivor of a Mission, all his fellow-priests having been massacred by native Indians. He had travelled to Buenos Aires to telegraph to Rome for advice on what to do next. The one-word reply came in, 'Return' and we watch as he disembarks and walks back into the jungle. And that's where he leaves us, wondering, perhaps, if this is a portrait of utter futility, the fatuous, suicidal, self-assertion of Christian authority or else a portrait of deeply human characteristics, faith, determination, courage, and hope that a better world might be brought into being through determination, pacifism, education, human touching. It sets a hallmark for the kind of work at which Graham excels, and which will appear again in again in his writings.

The preface, entitled '"To the Respectable Public"', also sets a tone of ironic humour and detachment which characterises all his work. It begins: 'Why the adjective "respectable" should be applied to the public rather than "gullible," "adipose," or "flatulent," I am unable to determine. Taken in bulk, the public is prone to eat and drink more than is good for it, either in its corporate or individual capacity. No reasonable being will maintain that its taste in art, literature, gastronomy, or politics is worth a moment's serious consideration. […] Still I presume it is respectable if only as the final court, to which all actors, politicians, mountebanks, physicians, lawyers, writers, whether of trifling articles like these or ponderous volumes destined to repose amid the dust of libraries, come for its decision.'

Graham's early work includes an electrifying account of his travels in North Africa, ***Mogreb-El-Acksa: A Journey in Morocco*** (1898), and then two collections of stories and sketches, ***The Ipané*** (1899) and ***Thirteen Stories*** (1900). The Preface to *The Ipané* concludes: 'I wrote that which is here collected to please no single being, and if my own feelings may be taken as the measure of the discerning public's generous judgement, I have succeeded well.' The self-deprecating irony is a steely constant. Some of the best stories here include 'Un Pelado', describing the lawful execution of a Mexican who knows no English in a small Texan town, a chilling depiction of the

smallness of life's value, where the prose itself is fully possessed of the precious nature of every lived moment. 'A Survival' is a succinct account of the history of Scottish literature and the character of Scotland's people and culture across centuries, their ability to endure hard conditions with their southern neighbour looming nearby: 'All that still lingers from another age is what we call a ghost – a ghost perhaps of happier, freer times, when men were less tormented about little things than we who live to-day.' Those 'pre-Knoxian and pre-bawbee days' haunt the memory of the present, narrowing horizon and the approaching commercialism. Among other tales of South and North American provenance, and of Scottish characters, 'Heather Jock', 'With the North-West Wind' and 'At Torfaieh' stand out, and the ferocious story, 'Snaekoll's Sage', about a feral Icelandic horse, is exceptional. But perhaps the most shocking item of all is entitled 'Niggers', which begins its effrontery with its title but then turns the reader's expectations around completely, leading to a conclusion where the accusation of racism, having been brilliantly defined, is focused now upon all those who perpetrate it. All races, nations, ethnicities, languages, identities, come under the scrutiny of the lesson here: racism itself is the creation of otherness, when truth lies in the experience of others of so many kinds, respecting the differences, celebrating them, being wary of them, learning from them, as we learn about ourselves.

Thirteen Stories (1900) includes more classic works. Merely to name a few is simply to indicate great places to start, or return to: 'Cruz Alta' (a failed horse-dealing venture), 'In a German Tramp' (set on ship-board), The Gold Fish' (a wonderful parable of dedication, courage, endurance and futility), 'A Hegira'(about the encroaching threat and near-extinction of native American Indians), 'A Pakeha' (a Scotsman's recollection of his life in New Zealand) and 'Calvary' (evoking the landscapes and riverscapes of the South American pampas). In 'Calvary', Graham sums up one aspect of his moral and political philosophy brilliantly, scorning 'holy commerce…which makes the whole world kin, reducing all men to the lowest common multiple; commerce that curses equally both him who buys and him who sells.' Graham's vision of monstrous modernity is even and finely balanced in its comprehensiveness.

These were followed by a historical account ***A Vanished Arcadia: The Jesuits in Paraguay, 1607 to 1767*** (1901), which might be read as a parallel account with the film, The Mission (written by Robert Bolt, directed by Roland Joffé, 1986). Another book of stories and sketches, *Success* (1902), included an account of the funeral of Queen Victoria, 'Might, Majesty, and Dominion', which begins by suggesting the glory, splendour and spectacle of the Empire and ends with two dogs and a beggar scouring an empty field for scraps in their hunger. Graham's facility with the Scots language comes through in the much-anthologised 'Beattock for Moffat' and in 'Sursum Corda', we are introduced to some of his former jail-mates. 'The Pyramid'

presents us with a troupe of circus acrobats and 'Terror' gives us a dead cat in Belgravia, while 'London' recounts the brief life and death of a Cingalese woman, named after the English Empire's greatest city, enduring an existence utterly foreign to it in her native Ceylon. The range of places, characters, atmospheres and kinds of movement (pedestrian, by horse, train, ship) in the writings is kaleidoscopic, global, but the tones, ironies, understated compassion, priority of social justice, the impossibility of egalitarianism, runs throughout.

Then came the first of Graham's biographies, ***Hernando de Soto together with an account of one of his Captains, Goncalo Silvestre*** (1903), centring on the Spanish explorer and conquistador (1497-1542). Characteristic motivation is spelled out in the opening sentence of the Preface: 'Mankind, that dearly loves a scapegoat to bear the burden of its sins, has made the Spanish conquest of America one of its favourite episodes at which to raise its eyes in horror to the Heaven that it tries viably to deceive.' In describing Spain's South American characters, ambitions, exploits and exploitations, Cunnighame Graham is elaborately writing an epic critique of empires and imperialisms of all kinds: 'if a man believes that, to win converts to his faith, that he is free to act as if he were a fiend, then is his god (as he discerns him) a mere devil, and scoffers, of whom the world holds an ever increasing store, shoot out their lips.' This is partly perhaps an explanation of Graham's fascination with and explorations of the conquistadores and dictators he will go on to write about. These works are not strictly speaking scholarly biographies or histories but nor are they fictionalised accounts or 'narrative history'. What makes them all distinctive in various ways is their author's uniquely animated imagination, his integration of a non-judgemental attitude with the depiction of atrocities and horrors, his curiosity about exactly what human beings are capable, how far we might go, how much might be endured, and to what purpose. Greed is only one of the motive forces at work. An appetite for the unknown, an urge to take the big risks, to weigh life and death, experience and reflection, is in all his writing.

His next books all gathered further short stories and historical accounts, brief sketches of people, events, moments he had experienced, etched in sharp prose, vivid images, brief, highly tense narratives, often simply poised on the edge of a revelation, leaving readers to draw their own conclusions. ***Progress, and Other Sketches*** (1905) was followed by ***His People*** (1906), ***Faith*** (1909), ***Hope*** (1910) and ***Charity*** (1912), which contains his profoundly moving, highly charged, beautifully restrained account of his and Gabriela's final departure from Gartmore, after the property had to be sold, 'A Braw Day'. Then comes ***A Hatchment*** (1913) and ***Scottish Stories*** (1914).

Highlights in *Progress, and Other Sketches* (1905) include the title story, itemising the destruction of all and any forms of aspiration; 'San José', which takes us ostrich-hunting using the bolas; 'Marianno Gonzales', portraits of snobbishness and

hesitancy; 'Faith', a parable about Mohammed and an old woman; 'El Khattaia-es-Salaa', explaining how all creatures except human beings have lost their powers of speech; 'A Yorkshire Tragedy', depicting a death in a mining village; specific location-evocations in 'The Laroch', 'Snow in Menteith' and 'Pollybaglan' and a character-portrait, 'A Convert', about a Scottish Presbyterian missionary in Africa, of whom it was said that 'no one was more detested […] From the earliest times, the tactless, honest, and aggressive missionary has been a thorn in the flesh of every one upon the coast of Africa.' But as the story's title portends, a conversion is not only possible, it's approaching. Will that signify the book's title? Is 'progress' ever possible at all?'

His People (1906) contains stories stretching from Scotland to Mexico, from 'The Grey Kirk', which opens, 'In a grey valley between hills, shut out from all the world by mist and moors, there lies a village with a little church' to Cadiz, in 'Dagos', where the city lies 'a very cup of burnished silver, in the fierce glare, and in the waters of the bay the pink and blue and yellow houses were reflected, looking as if a coral reef had turned into a town.' There is a gallery of portraits: of an ambitious professional chef ('Le Chef'), of Hulderico Schmidel ('the first historian of Buenos Aires and of Paraguay'), and in 'A Memory of Parnell' a moving recollection of the great Irish leader. We meet Matilda Hutton, 'A Botanist', and we encounter two women in a casino, being eyed under the calculating gaze of predatory men, in 'Signalled'. This marks another steely strand in Cunnighame Graham's writing, a sympathetic understanding of women, both in terms of a common humanity and in the specificity of social misogyny, patriarchy and exploitation. What we might call his proto-feminism, or simply just his feminism, comes through vividly here, edged with unspoken critique, and it will come to fuller expression in the essay, 'The Real Equality of the Sexes' (published *The New Age* in 1908 and collected in *An Eagle in a Hen-House: Selected Political Speeches and Writings*, edited by Lachlan Munro (Turriff: Ayton Publishing, 2017) and in the stories 'Un Monsieur' (in *Hope*, 1910) and 'Un Autre Monsieur' (in *Charity*, 1912).

In the first sentence of the Preface to *Faith* (1909), Graham explains something essential about his literary work: 'Everything that a man writes brings sorrow to him of one kind or other.' There is a long air of melancholia that runs throughout all his books, a sadness about the multitudinous ways in which human beings have fallen so far short of our potential. It is as if his works are a record of failed possibilities. Very few deliver a sense of victory, triumph, or easeful happiness. He is a tragedian, and understood what tragedy is, and in this respect, he is at the far end of the spectrum from the sentimentalism of the Kailyard writers, his Scottish contemporaries, authors of mawkish, saccharine tales of the life in small towns or villages, populated by ministers, schoolmasters, impish children and benevolent patriarchs. He detested these writers and explicitly wrote about the falsehoods they promoted. And in this Preface, he puts his own cards on the table: 'All that we write

is but a bringing forth again of something we have seen or heard about. What makes it art is but the handling of it, and the imagination that is brought to bear upon the themes out of the writer's brain. […] To record, even to record emotions, is to store up a fund of sadness, and that is why all writing is a sort of icehouse of the mind, in which that which was once a warm and living action, a feeling, scene, experience, joy, or sorrow, is now preserved, as it were, frozen, stiff, deprived actuality, and a mere chopping-block upon which fools exercise their wits.' Faith demonstrates this repeatedly in stories such as 'Sor Candida and the Bird' (a nun in a convent in Avila, Spain, forms an attachment to a wounded bird), 'A Silhouette' (two brothers, gauchos in Entre Rios, Argentina, come to grief and fall foul of each other), 'An Arab Funeral' (a haunting description of the event, with much left unspoken), 'Mektub' (set in Tangier), 'Lochan Falloch' and 'At the Ward Toll' (both set in Scotland), 'An Idealist' (a portrait of a London socialist) and 'In Christmas Week' (also set in London), and 'Dutch Smith' (another portrait, this one of an unsuccessful artist). All the stories bear out that sense of melancholy fortitude described in the Preface.

Hope (1910) extends the gallery with portraits of characters, evocations of places, reflections on passing forms of life, habits, older generations slipping away into history, forgotten in time. Simply quoting some of the titles gives a clear sense of their pitch and perspectives: 'The Grave of the Horseman', 'A Sebastianist' (which begins, 'He must have been the very last of his extraordinary sect…'), 'A Sailor (Old Style)', 'The Fourth Magus', The Colonel', 'The Admiral'. 'Un Monsieur', noted above, stands out as Graham describes a young prostitute, taking his own masculine perspective into full account as he draws a tender, unsentimental but sympathetic portrait of her life and prospects.

It is presumably the same woman who is reintroduced in 'Un Autre Monsieur', in *Charity* (1912), where her prospects are more firmly sketched out and her self-determination celebrated, while the first person singular, the male writer, is quite clearly put in his place in relation to the woman's self-possession and authority. This book also contains his profoundly moving, highly charged, beautifully detailed account of his and Gabriela's final departure from Gartmore, after the property had to be sold, 'A Braw Day'. Portraits of characters, evocations of places in Scotland, Argentina, Spain, are all infused with the feeling that opens 'San Andrés': 'Someone or other has said that the dead have a being of their own…'

Then comes ***A Hatchment*** (1913), with 'Los Indios' and 'El Rodeo' (set in the Pampas or the great plains, among Gauchos and Indian tribesmen), 'The Beggar Earl' (one of the great characters inhabiting the misty district of Menteith), 'Falkirk Tryst' and 'At Sandchidrian' (the former as profoundly of Scotland as the latter is of Spain). This was followed by ***Scottish Stories*** (1914), which collects stories and sketches from previously published volumes to give a multi-faceted exhibition of aspects of Graham's ancestral country.

Another biography, ***Bernal Diaz del Castillo*** (1915), told the story of the conquistador writer and soldier who accompanied Hernán Cortés in the conquest of the Aztecs, and who himself wrote his own account of the events, including Cortés's famous burning of the boats on arriving in South America, ensuring that his men were aware that they were travelling on a one-way journey, to conquest or oblivion. The soldier-writer is clearly a man with whom Graham himself felt some affinity, a man of action, certainly, but also a thoughtful, contemplative, careful artist in his own right.

More sketches were collected in ***Brought Forward*** (1916), including an emotionally charged portrait of Graham's friend and co-founder of the Labour Party, Keir Hardie, 'With the North-East Wind'. Again, settings of the sketches range from Argentina to Spain and Scotland. 'Bopicuá' describes the rounding-up of five hundred horses to be sent to Europe. Almost certainly to be killed in the fighting of the First World War. The author rides with the Gauchos, who are amazed at the care taken to select these 'doomed five hundred'. Once gathered and driven out to pasture on deep, lush grass, one of them is given the last words of the tale: '…I think it was Arena, or perhaps Pablo Suarez, spoke their elegy: "Eat well," he said; "there is no grass like that of La Pileta, to where you go across the sea. The grass in Europe all must smell of blood."'

Then there was a spell in which Graham published a series of historical, biographical and South America-based books: ***A Brazilian Mystic being the Life and Miracles of Antonio Conselheiro*** (1920) was followed by ***Cartagena and the Banks of the Sinu*** (1921), ***The Conquest of New Granada: Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada*** (1922) and ***The Conquest of the River Plate*** (1924). The fascination of these books lies in their subjects more than in their artistry, style or literary techniques.

Antônio Conselheiro, otherwise, Antônio Vicente Mendes Maciel (1830-97), was a religious visionary and leader of an anti-republican movement. Coming from a poor peasant family, he was intended for the church, but his developing mysticism led to messianic prophecies and he became famous in the interior of northeastern Brazil. He gathered followers and disciples over thirty years and led a revolt of thousands of local peasants, Indians and freed slaves, in the town of Canudos, advocating egalitarianism under God's protection, rejecting republican authority and maintaining the sole arbitration of Conselheiro (or, The Counsellor) himself. The Brazilian government responded with armed force putting it down in 1897. Conselheiro's death was followed by the slaughter of his followers. He was represented in Brazil as a mad religious fanatic but the contradictions of his character, the craziness of his epic effort, the ideals and their failure, were clearly qualities Graham responded to and perhaps felt some affinity with.

Cartagena and the Banks of the Sinú (1920) draws on Graham's expedition to Colombia in 1916-17 and along with *Mogreb-El-Acksa* (1898) is essentially a travel book, an

introduction to the country and its character, with an account of the life of Pedro de Heredia (c.1484-1554), the founder and first Governor of Cartagena. He refers to his journey there in the opening sentences of his Preface: 'Nothing could possibly have been a better corrective to the atmosphere of war, the excited newspapers, the people ever on the lookout for news, the accounts of hardship, heroism, and death at the front, and the oceans of false sentiment at home, than a visit to Cartagena and the Sinú. Little enough the people there were stirred by war news, though they regarded it with a mild curiosity, tempered by lack of faith in most of what they heard. […] After a week or two within the walls of the "unconquered city" one felt that there probably might be a war, up somewhere in the clouds, but that it did not matter much. In fact, one soon assumed the attitude of a man who passes by an ant-hill and sees the toiling multitudes beneath his feet, and then walks on, smoking a cigarette, and thinking that it is a fine day.'

The Conquest of New Granada being the Life of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada (1922) centres on Quesada (1509-79), another conquistador with whom Graham felt considerable sympathy. And *The Conquest of the River Plate* (1924) is a panorama of scenes and episodes, reintroducing Hulderico Schmidel, whom we met in *His People* (1906), depictions of native Indians as well as the conquistadors.

Doughty Deeds: An Account of the Life of Robert Graham of Gartmore, Poet & Politician, 1735-1797, drawn from his Letter-books & Correspondence (1925) is a biography of Graham's extraordinary ancestor and namesake, and opens with one of the senior Graham's poems, which gives the book its title:

If doughty deeds my ladye please,
Right soon I'll mount my steed;
And strong his arm, and fast his seat,
That bears frae me the meed.
I'll wear thy colours in my cap,
Thy picture in my heart;
And he that bends hot to thine eye
Shall rue it to his smart.
Then tell me how to woo thee, love;
O tell me how to woo thee!
For thy dear sake, nae care I'll take,
Tho' ne'er another trow me.

The poem is a fine, flamboyant gesture, a declaration of love and high intention, noble ambition and personal pride, broadly high-toned and fully charged with emotional presence, without a trace of irony or self-belittlement. Little wonder that Graham felt such affinity with its author.

Pedro de Valdivia Conqueror of Chile (1926) centres on the life of the conquistador (1487-1553). Graham has much to say also about the Araucanians, the native South American Indians whose war against the Spanish conquerors was extended, intensified and sustained to extraordinary lengths. Graham insists that such exceptional people warrant some appraisal. In the Preface, he establishes an essential perception that informed all his writings about conquistadors and the Spanish in South America: 'Englishmen, often led astray by Prescott [Willliam H. Prescott, author of The History of the Conquest of Mexico (1843) and The History of the Conquest of Peru (1847)], are apt to look upon the whole "Conquista" as a sordid-, money-grubbing enterprise carried out by buccaneers. Spaniards, on the other hand, are to be pardoned if they regard Drake, Hawkins, Frobisher, and all the rest of Queen Elizabeth's sea-dogs, as pirates, who attacked and pillaged defenceless settlements in time of peace between their kings. […] Naturally, Spaniard and Englishman alike had no objection to gold gained easily, and when they saw it to be had for the picking up, stooped for it readily. Still, both of them had higher motives than mere greed of conquest and of pelf.' Noting their loyalties to their countries and their religious faiths, by which they were 'surmounting all the puny hills of common sense.' Something similar might be said of Graham himself.

Later sketches in ***Redeemed*** (1927) include portraits of the writer, poet, anti-imperialist and traveller in Arabia, Wilfrid Scawen Blunt (1840-1922), Long Wolf (1833-92), chief of the Oglala Sioux and member of Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show, who was buried in London. Graham's account invests the Indian's story with his own sad poignancy: 'I like to think, when all is hushed in the fine summer nights, and even London sleeps, that the wolf carved on the tomb takes life upon itself and in the air resounds the melancholy wild cry from which the sleeper took his name.' Graham was not to know that Long Wolf's remains would be repatriated to his ancestral burial grounds on the Pine Rudge reservation at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1996. Another memorable item in the book is 'Inveni Portum', a marvellously evocative description of the funeral of Graham's friend Joseph Conrad. It begins with an atmospheric description of Canterbury, in Kent, where Conrad had lived, and then takes us through Conrad's life and work, on land and at sea, the depth of his religious commitment, and then we accompany Graham on the journey from town to the cemetery. Then Graham goes into a meditation on Conrad's books, writes about his person, his physical presence, the look of his face, feet, hands, and the quality of his mind, before returning to the cemetery: 'The gulls will bring him tidings as they fly above his grave, with their wild voices, if he should weary for the sea and the salt smell of it.' It is a masterly piece of writing.

Another biography came next, ***José Antonio Paez*** (1929), about one of the leaders of the liberation of Venezuela from Spain. Studded throughout Graham's historical and biographical books are nuggets of wisdom and provocation. In *Jose Antonio Paez*, for

example, there's this: 'The policy of Spain was to exclude all strangers from her South American possessions. Not so much on account of trade or contraband, but to keep out ideas. No government since the world began, however stupid, and some surely have been stupid enough to satisfy the most orthodox, but has felt instinctively, that once their people were to begin to think their power would soon be at an end. Monarchs and presidents, liberals, conservatives and socialists alike, are all agreed to stifle thought when once they are in power.'

And, in Graham's account, the commentary Paez made upon a schoolmaster's lot shows how far-seeing and comprehensive was his mind. '"Do not forget" he writes, "that teaching is the most painful career an educated man can undertake…it calls for absolute self-abnegation for it is a continual hand to hand struggle, with the ignorance, the prejudice and the vices of the age." No one could have written more sympathetically or with more insight of a schoolmaster's daily life. It does the writer honour, not only for the qualities of intellect it shows, but of the finer feelings of the heart. Paez had always that respect for learning, that only the most highly educated and the illiterate feel.'

A retrospective collection appeared edited by his literary agent, one of the most significant figures in the Anglophone literary world of that era, Edward Garnett, ***Thirty Tales and Sketches*** (1930), spanning collections from 1899 to 1927.

The Horses of the Conquest (1930) was a full-blown account of his favourite animal, and is dedicated to his favourite horse, Pampa, which he had discovered in the harness of a Glasgow tram: My black Argentine – who I rode for twenty years, without a fall. May the earth lie on him, as lightly as he once trod upon its face. Vale…or until so long.'

Writ in Sand (1932) collected later tales and sketches, including 'Tschiffely's Ride', an account of the three-year journey undertaken by A.F. Tschiffely, a Swiss settled in Argentina, from Buenos Aires to New York on the two horses Mancho and Gata. Graham did not know Tschiffely when he wrote the sketch but he was to become a firm friend and Graham's first biographer.

His last biography was ***Portrait of a Dictator: Francisco Solano Lopez*** (1933), an account of the leader of Paraguay through the Triple Alliance War of the 1860s

Two volumes were published in the year of his death, ***Mirages*** (1936) and ***Rodeo***, selected by A.F. Tschiffely (1936). *Mirages* may be Graham's last judgement on the world. Its Preface, entitled, 'To Empire Builders', ends, speaking of Empires, 'Virtue in them is quite as rarely rewarded as it is in real life, nor is vice especially triumphant. But then, although they tell us that death is the wages of the sinner, as far as I can see, it seems to be not very different for the saint.' That 'as far as I can see' is a phrase with very powerful meaning in Graham's life and work, as even a brief

overview of his writings demonstrates. He did indeed see far, and wide, sharply, and deeply. If that statement echoes far with its melancholy pessimism, it is rescued from misery by a tinge, a taint, a colouring of humour, neither bitter nor sour nor self-pitying, but wistfully, darkly, unrepentantly ironic. Comedy, as well as tragedy, are within Graham's purview, his vision and scope. The character of the man comes across most powerfully in this collection with 'Mirage', the first story, a short meditation on the subject itself. 'Músicos!' describes an apocalyptic conflagration of a musical theatre, performers, instruments, audience, and all. Other stories take us back to Spain, the Firth of Clyde in Scotland, and Buenos Ayres in South America.

The final story, 'Facón Grande', is a last look back at some of the characters with whom Graham rode, horseback, 'in the far-off days', and concludes with a poignant sense of personal farewell: 'Where they ride now is but a matter of conjecture; no one remembers them but I who write these lines, that I have written *in memoriam*, hoping that some day they will allow an old companion to ride with them, no matter where they ride.' Those three repetitions of the word 'ride', rhyming unemphatically with 'write', as 'ridden' rhymes with 'written', is literary sophistication of a keen kind, unobtrusive, unemphatic, but touching in its unusualness, its idiosyncrasy, its uniqueness, its unrepeatability. Writing like this cannot be manufactured, it comes from no 'Artificial Intelligence' but from a particular human mind, and after a lifetime's specific experience.

Tschiffely, introducing his selection of Graham's work in *Rodeo*, admits his dilemma: 'If I were asked to select fifty paintings by a Raphael, a Da Vinci, or a Velazquez, the task of deciding which pictures to hang in an exhibition representing the master's particular art would not be more difficult than it has been for me to select the tales and sketches in this book.' He gives way, before the collected stories and sketches commence, to Graham's own valedictory Preface, this one addressed 'To the Incurious Reader'. Graham thanks Allah that the reader may be 'incurious' and that all his errors, his crimes against the English language, errors in taste, and faults in grammar, committed over a period of forty years may not be unforgiven, or even of much concern to someone looking for no more than 'a recreation for an hour or two'. For however agonising the writer's task may have been and however inadequate he judges himself to be, 'The Temple of Ancyra still stands unharmed in the clear Anatolian air despite the micturition of innumerable dogs.' And it still does.

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