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"Take a look at our world": from Minoan Roots to Ecotopia in Robert Graves' *Seven Days in New Crete*

Abstract I: Questo articolo analizza *Seven Days in New Crete* (1949) di Robert Graves attraverso una prospettiva ecocritica, integrata con gli island studies e la ricezione classica. Lo spazio immaginario di "New Crete" costituisce l'agente ecocentrico attivo della narrazione, intersecando la riscrittura delle fonti minoiche, l'esperienza biografica dell'autore e la radicale critica alla modernità tecnologica. Attraverso una struttura triplice, che considera la Maiorca biografica, la fittizia Nuova Creta e la Creta storica, l'articolo propone una lettura del romanzo quale ecotopia *ante litteram*, in cui il rapporto simbiotico con la terra costituisce l'essenza della società.

Abstract II: This article examines Robert Graves' *Seven Days in New Crete* (1949) by integrating ecocriticism, island studies, and classical reception. Rather than a static utopian backdrop, the fictional space of New Crete emerges as an active, eco-centric agent where the rewriting of Minoan myth, the author's biographical experience, and a radical critique of technological modernity converge. By exploring the intersection of fictional space, biographical experience, and classical antiquity, the article proposes a reading of the novel as an ecotopia *ante litteram*, in which a symbiotic relationship with the land constitutes the very foundation of human society.

Keywords: Robert Graves, Ecocriticism, Island Studies, Classical Reception, Ecotopia.

1. Introduction: A Utopia Out of Time

Published in 1949, *Seven Days in New Crete* remains one of the least studied works in Graves' fiction, overshadowed by the success of his major prose works like *I, Claudius* (1998), his influential war memoir *Good-Bye to All That* (2018), and his masterpiece *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (1999). In his introduction to the novel, Martin Seymour-Smith argues that *Seven Days in New Crete* may now be seen as a book in every way as important as Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), though "when it was first published in 1949 it was at least thirty years ahead of its time" (Seymour-Smith 1983: vii). Notwithstanding such high critical relevance, the novel's prophetic quality accounts for its relative neglect both within Graves' own corpus and within the broader critical debate on twentieth-century utopian fiction. Yet, largely neglected as it

has been, *Seven Days in New Crete* offers a uniquely sophisticated renegotiation of temporal and spatial boundaries. Where Huxley and Orwell project the anxieties of the present into technological futures, Graves imagines a future built on the past in a civilisation that has not progressed but returned.

The novel follows Edward Venn-Thomas, a twentieth-century British poet who is magically summoned into a far-future society called New Crete. Its civilisation traces its origins back to the pre-patriarchal Minoan roots of Western culture. Venn-Thomas spends seven days in this world, watching, questioning, and gradually being unsettled by what he finds. The novel opens onto several levels simultaneously: it is utopian fiction, autobiography, myth, and an ecocritical text of unusual depth and contemporary relevance.

To this end, my reading of *Seven Days in New Crete* considers the novel as an island text situated within Graves' literary macrocosm. Specifically, the argument unfolds across three distinct dimensions. The first concerns the fictional space itself: New Crete is not a generic utopian nowhere but a specifically insular world, shaped by the logic and psychology of island existence as theorised in the field of island studies. The second is biographical, for the fictional island is grounded in Mallorca, where Graves had lived since 1929. In his essay "Why I live in Majorca 1953" he identified the island as the enabling condition of his work as a poet. The third layer is mythological: the novel's engagement with the Minoan past, with Crete as the historical origin of a pre-patriarchal, goddess-centred civilisation, transforms the island from biographical fact and fictional setting into a mythological resource and an ecological argument. These three islands, fictional New Crete, biographical Mallorca, and historical Crete, are superimposed throughout the text and reading them together produces a richer account of the novel's meaning.

2. Theoretical Framework

The existing scholarship on *Seven Days in New Crete* has highlighted the biographical and cultural-historical context of the novel with great precision. Cathy Gere's reading of the text within Minoan modernism remains essential; yet her focus on Arthur Evans' archaeology and Graves' muses leaves the novel's ecological and insular dimensions largely unexplored (Gere 2009: 195-207). To this end, the article addresses that gap by integrating ecocriticism, island studies, and classical reception into a single interpretive lens.

To investigate "the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty & Fromm 1996: xviii), this study draws upon two foundational concepts from ecocriticism. The first is Lawrence Buell's notion of "place-consciousness", in terms of "the consciousness of the nonhuman environment as a network enfolding human inhabitants", which he identifies as "a utopian project that realizes itself, in its more instructive forms, not as a *fait accompli* but as an incompletion undertaken in awareness that place is something we are always in the process of finding" (Buell 1995: 260). The second is Greg Garrard's concept of "dwelling", which is "not a transient state; rather, it implies the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work" (Garrard 2012: 117). As Garrard argues, drawing on the classical model of Virgil's *Georgics*, this ecological mode emphasises the crucial relationship between "agricultural productivity [and] ritual observance" (Garrard 2012: 118).

Simultaneously, the article applies Godfrey Baldacchino's theory of insularity to explore how island isolation fosters a heightened awareness of place. Specifically, the condition of "boundedness" produces "the island effect", whereby life is "intense, distilled, exaggerated" precisely because it is contained (Royle & Brinklow 2018: 9). Moreover, Stephen A. Royle and Laurie Brinklow also note that "everyone on an island today would have an ancestor who has moved to that island" (Royle & Brinklow 2018: 12). New Crete draws its identity from the deep classical memory of the Minoan world, whose insularity had already, in Graves' mythographic imagination, protected it from the patriarchal contamination of the mainland. It is precisely this capacity of the island to function as a protected space of cultural memory and alternative social organisation that connects island studies to the utopian tradition: "the isolated island notion has also been used to set out utopias, most notably in the original *Utopia* by Sir Thomas More" (Royle & Brinklow 2018: 17).

The title of the novel itself acknowledges its debt to classical antiquity, which is the engine of Graves' entire macrocosm. To this end, Lorna Hardwick's model of active classical reception (Hardwick 2003: 1-10) helps to examine how Graves reappropriates ancient sources in response to his own historical crisis. The practice revolves around two classical tropes: Minoan Crete as the historical instance of a pre-patriarchal, goddess-centred civilisation, and Plato's *Republic* (1969) as the foundational text of the Western utopian tradition that the novel explicitly targets and inverts. The reading is supported by archival evidence, specifically Graves' correspondence while writing from a Barcelona hospital. Isolated from his library, Graves was forced to reconstruct the fictional world entirely from memory, as he wrote to John Auerbach, "I felt lonely too" (Graves 1957). The circumstances mirror the novel's central message: true civilisation relies on living myth, rather than on technological tools. The letters written before, during, and after the novel's composition are therefore treated here as documents that illuminate the relationship between displacement, mythic memory, and fictional imagination.

The analysis moves through several physical places that lead directly to the space of New Crete. The first one is Mallorca, the biographical terrain that grounded Graves' environmental sensibility and nurtured his insular imagination. It then turns to Ancient Crete, whose pre-patriarchal, goddess-centred civilisation supplied the mythographic blueprint for a non-industrial social order. Finally, it culminates in New Crete itself, the imaginative space where lived experience and classical memory converge into a dynamic, living landscape. Because each island conceptually enables the next, tracing this progression is essential to uncovering the coherence of Graves' ecological argument.

3. Mallorca: The Biographical Island

The biographical island underlying Graves' imagination is Mallorca. Notably, the Balearic Islands occupy a distinctive place in the cultural geography of literary modernism. In 1929, following a personal crisis in London, Graves settled in the remote mountain village of Deià on the recommendation of Gertrude Stein, who described Mallorca as "paradise – if you can stand it" (Jessop 2016: 124). There, Graves and Laura Riding built their main home Canellún, continued the work of the Seizin Press, and created an intellectual community that attracted

poets, critics, and artists from across Europe. As Anett Jessop has shown, it was in Mallorca that Graves developed his distinctive practice of imaginatively inhabiting history rather than reconstructing it through scholarship (Jessop 2016: 138). This practice reaches its most radical expression in *Seven Days in New Crete*, where the Minoan past is not cited but lived.

In "Why I Live in Majorca 1953" Graves offers a practical account of his reasons for choosing the island. But the deeper reasons emerge as the essay proceeds. What he was fleeing, above all, was the growing mechanisation of England: "the growing mechanization of agriculture. I wanted to go where town was still town; and country, country" (Graves 1965: 7). The Mallorcan environment nurtures Graves' imagination, foreshadowing the landscape of New Crete**.** Mallorca is chosen because it has not yet been subjected to the logic of industrial modernity. What Graves found in Deià anticipates with remarkable precision the landscape of New Crete: an agricultural and seasonal rhythm, an economy based on olives and figs, and a sense of the sacred embedded in the physical environment. The church at Deià, he notes, "is said to be built on the site of an Iberian shrine of the Moon-goddess" (Graves 1965: 13). Therefore, the island embodies the same feminine sacred that will organise New Cretan society.

Graves further describes Mallorca as uniquely suited to the poet's work. Unlike the distracting chaos of London, the island offers "absolute quiet [...] admirable for people whose minds already teem with ideas that need recording in absolute quiet: poets, mathematicians, musicians, sculptors and such" (Graves 1965: 9). Notably, in the society of New Crete, poets occupy a central social role precisely because the island's conditions make genuine poetic work possible. The biographical experience and the fictional vision are continuous and reciprocal, for the island produces the poet, and the poet produces the island.

In Royle and Brinklow's terms, Graves earned his Mallorcan islandness through decades of chosen exile: "those who choose to live on an island must learn and 'earn' their islandness" (Royle & Brinklow 2018: 12). The earned quality is what distinguishes Graves' relationship with Mallorca from that of modernist visitors who passed through the Balearics without making the island their condition of existence. For Graves, the island was not a creative episode but a permanent commitment that shaped the very mode of his imagination.

Graves' correspondence confirms that the insular imagination was the direct source of *Seven Days in New Crete*. Before the novel received its final title, Graves referred to it in his letters simply as "my crazy Utopia" (Graves 1948c). The designation registers his awareness of the project's position within, and against, the dominant literary trends of his moment. The mid-twentieth century was the golden age of the dystopia: Huxley's *Brave New World* (2017) and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2021) had established the technological nightmare as the period's most culturally resonant imaginative form. Yet, as Lyman Tower Sargent observes, "utopias were published throughout the period that the dystopia dominated" but "went unnoticed until the upsurge in utopianism in the so-called 'Sixties'" (Sargent 2010: 30). *Seven Days in New Crete* belongs to this invisible counter-current, and what distinguishes Graves' contribution is the direction of the utopian impulse: not towards rational social organisation but towards the recovery of an ecologically grounded relationship between human communities and the natural world. As Chang Hui-chuan notes, "the rise of ecological utopia [...] testifies to the emergence of a new sub-genre in the sphere of utopian literature and a rad-

ical departure from the path of canonical utopia" (Chang 2005: 252). Sargent identifies this sub-genre as the ecological reorientation of the utopian tradition (Sargent 2010: 31), crystallised in Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (2004). While the term did not yet exist, Graves' novel anticipates several features that would later come to characterise the ecotopian tradition.

As Seymour-Smith recognised, Graves was "a cyclical rather than a linear thinker" and his novel's insistence that human communities should organise themselves around organic rather than mechanical principles "might have seemed odd in 1949 but now does not" (Seymour-Smith 1983: xv); indeed, he adds that "in these days when everyone should be an ecologist – and more – it gives food for thought" (Seymour-Smith 1983: xxii). It is in this precise sense that *Seven Days in New Crete* is read here as an ecotopia *ante litteram*: the novel anticipates the defining features of this sub-genre through the bounded, cyclical, ecologically alive island whose logic is also the logic of the ecological alternative.

Crucially, Graves' visionary impulse was intimately tied to the material circumstances of its creation, as the novel was composed under conditions that mirror its central argument. When Graves was forced to leave Mallorca in 1947 to accompany his son William to a Barcelona clinic, he began writing the novel. Writing in displacement, stripped of his library, Graves reconstructed an entire civilisation from memory alone. Graves' correspondence from 1948 allows us to reconstruct the novel's development with considerable precision. Writing to Seppl Campalans on 2 May 1948, Graves described the project's central diagnostic impulse: "it's a utopia which like all utopias is a criticism of the present and tries to point out where the train of civilisation jumped the rails" (Graves 1948a). A letter to James Reeves dated 13 May 1948 reveals the speed of composition and Graves' organic writing process: the novel was "in the 5th day and four chapters or so from the end: a damned queer affair. I have had only the vaguest idea what was going to happen and left the logic of events to surprise me, chapter by chapter. It concerns the problem of evil: how much evil is needed to sustain 'the good life'" (Graves 1948b). Writing to Federico de la Iglesia on 13 December 1948, Graves described the work as set "about 4000 A.D. and in the post-scientific neo-primitive age" (Graves 1948d). The phrase "neo-primitive" encapsulates the retro-utopian logic of the entire text: a future constructed from archaic materials, in which progress is replaced by deliberate recovery. The biographical and fictional islands can thus be understood as imaginative extensions of one another. As Graves made explicit in a letter to Margot Nichols in October 1960: "How to get to New Crete? We are there already" (Graves 1960). The present tense is definitive: not "it was based on Mallorca" but "we are there". Mallorca is New Crete transfigured; or rather, New Crete is Mallorca extended backward in time to its Minoan origins and forward into a post-technological future. The identification lays the ground for the third island: ancient Crete, whose pre-patriarchal, goddess-centred civilisation provides both the mythographic foundation and the ecological blueprint for the world Graves imagined from a Barcelona clinic in 1947.

4. Ancient Crete: The Mythological Island

While Mallorca provided the immediate biographical and environmental blueprint for Graves' utopia, the conceptual foundation of New Crete rests on a third, historical island: ancient Crete. A letter to Basil Liddell Hart from November 1944 shows Graves already

thinking of Minoan Crete in civilisational terms: "you should have a look at the fashions of Minoan Crete, the most civilised society of antiquity and the most pacific" (Graves 1944a). A letter to Beryl Graves dated 29 December 1944 outlines the core matriarchal structures that would later define New Cretan society: "the historical fact to be preserved was that 'all families in Crete were descended from the mother until the fall of Cnossos [...] and that the girls had free sexual relations before marriage in honour of the Mother Goddess'" (Graves 1944b). The Minoan Island, the matrilineal family, the Goddess: these are the materials Graves was assembling three years before the Barcelona clinic.

Graves' idealised vision was deeply indebted to Arthur Evans' excavations at Knossos, which provided archaeological legitimacy for his mythographic vision. Indeed, Evans had been one of Graves' neighbours at Boar's Hill, near Oxford, in the years following the First World War (Momigliano 2020: 124). It was Evans who constructed the modern myth of Minoan Civilisation, interpreting its palaces as evidence of a peaceful, artistic, goddess-worshipping matriarchy. As Gere has argued, Evans' importance for modernism lay in an epistemological paradox: "by denying its own florid subjectivity, archaeology seemed to provide objective confirmation of some of the most irrationalist strains of modernist thought" (Gere 2009: 6-7), allowing modernist writers to use his findings as empirical validation for visions that were, at their core, mythographic. Graves "created Minoan Crete as the goddess-worshipping Atlantis that must surely have existed before humans invented war" (Gere 2009: 207), producing a work "explicitly prophetic and prescriptive in tone, exhorting the reader to learn the great lessons of the twentieth century and to return to the way of Cretan peace" (Gere 2009: 207).

However, subsequent scholarship has substantially revised Evans' account, challenging both the matriarchal hypothesis and the characterisation of Minoan society as uniquely peaceful. From this perspective, his reconstruction of Minoan civilisation proves to be as much an act of imagination as of scholarly research. As Joseph Alexander MacGillivray has shown, the world Evans created at Knossos was "exactly to his taste", "set in a beautiful Mediterranean country, aristocratic and humane in feeling [...] a world which served to isolate him from a present in which he had found no real place" (MacGillivray 2000: 3), explicitly conceived as "the perfect antidote to industrialized Europe and America" (MacGillivray 2000: 3). According to MacGillivray, "Evans' Minoans are an example of how an archaeological discovery occurs first in the mind, born of the thinker's need to prove something of vital importance to himself" (MacGillivray 2000: 3). Kenneth D. S. Lapatin further confirms this hypothesis. He argues that those who have engaged with the Minoan material have consistently "painted their preconceptions, desires, and preoccupations for an idealized past" (Lapatin 2002: 184), producing "valuable lessons in the subjectivity of historical reconstruction" (Lapatin 2002: 184). As Lapatin observes, "the greater the certainty with which moderns explain ancient belief systems, the more we must suspect that their convictions reflect present desires rather than past realities" (Lapatin 2002: 90).

The critical perspective does not diminish the significance of Evans' work; rather, it clarifies Graves' use of Evans. Graves was aware of the speculative nature of his Minoan sources: the self-deprecating "crazy utopia" of his correspondence signals precisely the awareness. But where Evans projected Victorian ideals onto the Bronze Age, Graves project-

ed an ecological argument: he used the same uncertain, reconstructed, mythographically charged material not to escape the present but to challenge it. The Minoan past, however dubious as history, was entirely usable as myth, and it is as myth, not as scholarship, that it enters *Seven Days in New Crete*.

Graves' engagement with the ancient world is not only creative but also contentious. While ancient Crete represents the historical instance of a pre-patriarchal, goddess-centred society ruled by a symbiotic relationship between human community and the natural world, its reappropriation must be understood in direct opposition to the dominant philosophical paradigm of the classical tradition: Plato's *Republic*. Within Graves' reading of the classical tradition, the Platonic *Kallipolis* comes to represent a rupture in which logos is privileged over mythos and the poets are excluded from the ideal city. In Chapter IV, Ben-Yeshu's Critique of Utopias analyses "some seventy utopias, including Plato's Timaeus and Republic", concluding that "no writer of a Utopia had ever applied himself to make good the damage done by Plato, when he banished poets from his Republic and preached a scornful indifference to poetic myth"[1]. However, Graves' reading must be situated within its historical moment. *When Seven Days in New Crete* was composed in 1947, the *Republic* was not merely a philosophical text but a politically charged one: Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1994) had recently identified Plato as the intellectual father of totalitarianism, an argument that resonated powerfully in the aftermath of the Second World War. As Seymour-Smith noted, Graves shared Popper's hostility towards the *Republic*, which he "always loathed, both as totalitarian and over-solemn" (Seymour-Smith 1983: xiv). In this context, the expulsion of the poets from the ideal city becomes the founding gesture of a rationalist tradition which Graves associated with the technological devastation of the twentieth century. This idea aptly echoes the same "growing mechanization" from which he had fled to Mallorca (Graves 1965: 7). By using ancient Crete to invert that gesture, Graves frames the Minoan past as an active philosophical counter-model to the Western rationalism that, according to his viewpoint, had severed the relationship between human society and the natural world.

The mythographic reappropriation finds its most sustained theoretical elaboration in *The White Goddess* (1948), published one year before the novel. Here, Graves argues that Minoan Crete represents the last intact instance of a pre-patriarchal civilisation organised around the Goddess rather than a Father God. According to this account, "there was no Father God", and the Goddess remains "the mother of all things; her sons and lovers partake of the sacred essence only by her grace" (Graves 1999: 388), not a deity among others but the cosmological principle organising the entire social and ecological order. The distinction between a "Mother Country" and a "Father Land" (Graves 1999: 408) maps directly onto the novel's ecological argument: the former is a landscape inhabited in a relation of care and reciprocity; the latter a territory claimed, owned, and exploited. New Crete is the fictional realisation of the former, and Minoan Crete its historical legitimation. The insularity of Crete was precisely what allowed it to develop a balanced, peaceful social order shielded from mainland expansion, just as the sea surrounding New Crete protects the recovered civilisa-

[1] Graves (1983: 42). All subsequent quotations from the novel are from this edition; page numbers will hereafter be given parenthetically in the text.

tion from the rational world that preceded it. Graves outlined "the Cretan Novel" and the "historical fact to be preserved" that "all families in Crete were descended from the mother until the fall of Cnossos [...] and that the girls had free sexual relations before marriage in honour of the Mother Goddess" (Graves 1944b).

Seven Days in New Crete is not a fictional illustration of *The White Goddess* but its imaginative complement. Where the mythographic work reconstructs the mythic past as scholarly argument through a dense apparatus of sources, the novel projects it into a speculative future as lived reality and does so without access to any of those sources. The Minoan world of New Crete is therefore not derived from scholarship but produced independently from the same internalised mythic substrate.

5. New Crete: The Fictional Island

In *Seven Days in New Crete*, the three islands converge, for New Crete is Mallorca transfigured and Minoan Crete reborn. The fictional space draws simultaneously on the biographical rhythms of Deià and the mythographic structures of the pre-patriarchal past. New Crete presents the ecological alternative to modern decline as a lived reality, embedded in landscape, character, and ritual. From the moment Venn-Thomas arrives, it emerges as a world with its own logic, its own demands, and its own capacity to unsettle the visitor who enters it. The textual evidence traces three dimensions of this agency: the island as an ecological landscape, the island as a mirror of Venn-Thomas' displacement, and the island as a ritual body.

From the very beginning, New Crete asserts itself as an ecological landscape. Venn-Thomas' first perception of New Crete is, significantly, an ecological one. Looking out at the familiar Mediterranean coastline, he notices an immediate transformation:

> As for your whereabouts, if you look out of the window you will perhaps recognize this district. Yes, the district was familiar. That rocky headland, the low hill, with the church of Sainte Véronique on the top – except that it was not the same church, and perhaps not a church at all. The Mediterranean had retreated a mile or more, a broad belt of farmland stretched nearly to the horizon, and the bare hills were now covered with trees. I thought they looked much better this way (2).

The recognition encoded in that last sentence is crucial. The hills are better wooded, not merely aesthetically, but ecologically. The transformation is the result of centuries of patient stewardship: the island has been worked with rather than subdued. This is not the landscape of colonial conquest but of organic collaboration. In Buell's terms, the opening passage establishes a "place-consciousness" that will deepen as the narrative progresses: the island is already making claims on Venn-Thomas' imagination that his rational, modern consciousness is not equipped to process.

The chapter entitled "Take a Look at Our World" extends the ecological logic into daily life. The magicians' garden is paved with "flags of moss-covered sandstone", the paths run "not quite straight" through "slightly undulating" lawns, and a brook runs over slate pebbles into a fish-pool. When Venn-Thomas asks about the design, Sally explains that "straight lines, level surfaces and a large variety of flowers fatigued the eye, and that the garden was

intended for relaxation" (34). The rejection of the straight line is simultaneously an aesthetic, an ecological, and a philosophical position. To impose geometric order on a living landscape is to misunderstand what a landscape is for. Garrard's concept of 'dwelling' enacts the design principle in the very shape of the garden paths.

The herb garden extends the logic into the domain of knowledge. A polygonal enclosure in which plants are arranged "in thirteen divisions according to their seasonal virtues", it follows the thirteen-month lunar calendar, where herbs are picked "according to the age of the moon and the day of the week" (49). The garden operates as a living library organised by natural time rather than scientific classification. The knowledge it embodies is ecological: it maps seasonal interdependencies and the ways in which plants, the moon, and the people who tend them are part of the same living system. The alternative epistemology is only possible because of the island's boundedness: what Baldacchino identifies as the island community's capacity to sustain cyclical time against the linear time of the mainland (Royle & Brinklow 2018: 9). The boundedness that isolates New Crete is what makes a different way of knowing possible.

Even the most apparently mundane detail of New Cretan agriculture encodes this regenerative principle. In the parkland, animals wear wide leather shoes to protect the turf, and "the manure is returned to the land once a year, sprayed over the whole surface, so that the grass grows evenly" (51). The closed cycle of returning waste to the earth that produced it embodies the society's governing logic: nothing is extracted without restitution; nothing is taken without being given back. Coupled with the cultural law that "it is part of our religion never to waste food or any other product of the soil" (112), farming practices become a radical philosophical defence of environmental sustainability, transforming New Crete into a functional ecotopia. Taken together, these details construct New Crete as a functioning ecological system, whose logic, however, can only be perceived by a visitor willing to abandon the habits of the world he comes from.

If New Crete is the novel's protagonist, Venn-Thomas is its reluctant antagonist, because he cannot fully inhabit the values he intellectually recognises as superior. His trajectory across the seven days is one of progressive exposure: the island holds up a mirror to his modernity, and what he sees is both attractive and intolerable. Touring the garden with Sally, Venn-Thomas registers a characteristic ambivalence: "When Sally was about I felt the temptation to criticize all I saw, almost to the extent of feeling a loyalty to my own obviously inferior epoch" (50). He knows his epoch is inferior (as he himself puts it) yet he cannot relinquish his loyalty to it. Venn-Thomas embodies a rational acknowledgement of ecological failure combined with an emotional inability to imagine a genuinely non-extractive relationship with the natural world.

That distance transforms into outright revulsion. Witnessing one of the island's ritual procedures, Venn-Thomas records: "I felt a sudden intense disgust; why did I ever consent to visit this place? Curiosity had borne down my commonsense. I didn't belong, and I dislike Utopias" (88). In Royle and Brinklow's terms, Venn-Thomas has been summoned to New Crete but has not earned his islandness, for he has not undergone the long process of learning and internalising the island's values that would make genuine belonging possible. The island's strict geographical and social boundedness, which makes it an ecological lab-

oratory, also renders it expulsive: a man from mechanical modernity cannot inhabit an ecological civilisation in seven days. However, the island does not leave Venn-Thomas entirely untouched. Recalling a supernatural experience "in the Balearics on a lonely coast road, near a village where a temple of Diana had once stood", he describes: "On each occasion it was dusk with a waxing moon, and I felt that sudden inexplicable dread that makes the hair of one's scalp rise" (91-92).

Not only does this serve as the novel's most explicit biographical bridge in which the biographical island and the fictional island converge, but it also aligns with Buell's concept of "place-consciousness" in its most intense, bodily form. Indeed, it is an involuntary response to a landscape saturated with pre-Christian sacred presence. The Balearics are a direct invocation of Mallorca, and the temple of Diana is the same feminine sacred that Graves located at Deià. Venn-Thomas carries the sensory memory into New Crete, and it is what allows him, at his best moments, to perceive the island not merely intellectually but viscerally. New Crete's most powerful claim to agency lies in its ritual structure. Its system of practices embodies the island's innermost logic and the mechanism by which its ecological philosophy is continuously reproduced. The abolition of linear time is the foundation:

> We observe the phases of the moon; we distinguish morning from afternoon and afternoon from evening; we keep the days of the week; we mark the passage of the seasons; and the two parts of our double year end with the first full moon after the longest day and the first full moon after the shortest day. But time in an absolute sense was abolished on the same occasion on which it was agreed to abolish money (63).

The equation of linear time with money and the simultaneous abolition of both is the novel's most condensed ecocritical argument. Within the logic of the novel, linear time can be read as the temporal form of capitalism: the time of accumulation, progress, and extraction. Conversely, cyclical time (lunar, seasonal, agricultural) represents the temporal form of ecological existence: the time of return, restoration, and the closed cycle. The temporal reorganisation is only possible because of the island's function as what Royle and Brinklow identify as a laboratory. In this bounded space, alternative forms of social organisation can be sustained because they are protected from mainland contamination. The abolition of linear time emerges as a practical consequence of insularity. On the mainland, where exchange with the outside world is continuous and the logic of accumulation inescapable, such an abolition would be structurally impossible. It is the sea that makes the ecological experiment thinkable.

The social reorganisation of time finds its concentrated expression in the ritual verse recited during one of the island's ceremonies: "Respect the fertile spaciousness of earth / As you respect Her who here reigns" (87). The identification of the earth with the Goddess collapses the distinction between ecology and religion that modern Western thought has maintained as a structural axiom. To care for the land is to honour the divine, while to exploit it is sacrilege. This mirrors Graves' conception that religion and poetry are expressions of the same impulse: the attentiveness to the sacred that the natural world demands and that only the poet is equipped to sustain.

The same logic governs New Cretan production: "It is part of our religion never to

waste food or any other product of the soil" (112). This reaches its most radical formulation in the principle of "nothing without the hand of love": "no product turned out by a machine, however harmless it might appear, whether a jam-pot, a screw-driver or a box of chocolates, had love in it" (44). Within New Crete's value system, the machine is excluded not because it is inefficient but because it is conceived as incapable of care, for it has no relationship with the earth from which its materials were extracted.

Within this context, the poet is the figure who gives institutional expression to this ethic of care. Ben-Yeshu's founding argument makes it explicit: "If we strengthen the poets and let them become the acknowledged legislators of the new world, magic will come into its own again, bringing peace and fertility in its train" (44). The lexeme "fertility" must be read in literal and ecological terms, meaning the repair of a world where "the train of civilisation jumped the rails" (Graves 1948a). In doing so, poets are the ecological guardians of New Crete itself. They maintain the ritual knowledge that connects human community to the cycle of the natural world. Where Plato's philosopher-kings govern through rational detachment from the material world, Graves' poet-magicians sustain the island's fertility through their attentiveness to the earth as a living, sacred presence. Not only do they inhabit the island, but they are also responsible for it, mediating its demands on the community and the community's obligations to it. The island emerges as a bounded space where the experiment of living in genuine ecological relationship with the land has been conducted for centuries, protected from mainland contamination by the surrounding sea. The poet as ecological intermediary is the novel's most radical inversion of the Platonic tradition and its most direct connection to the Minoan past, where the poet's function was the perpetuation of the Goddess' sacred mysteries. That a new religion and a new ecology "could spring only from primitive soil" (41) remains the novel's deepest conviction. The soil is not merely a medium but a source; the primitive is not a lack but a resource. New Crete is a deliberate retrieval of a way of inhabiting the earth that existed before patriarchy replaced the Goddess and industry replaced the hand of love. The island is what makes the recovery thinkable: bounded, cyclical, and alive.

6. Conclusions

By reading *Seven Days in New Crete* through ecocriticism, island studies, and classical reception, the article has demonstrated that Graves' speculative world operates as an active, eco-centric agent. The three dimensions do not merely map onto distinct geographical spaces. They enact a radical temporal collapse: ancient Crete represents the mythic past, Mallorca the lived present, and New Crete the speculative future. Yet, within Graves' cyclical imagination, these temporalities are not arranged linearly. Graves bends the far future (AD 4000) back towards the pre-patriarchal memory of the past, anchored firmly in the insular sanctuary of the biographical present. In doing so, he articulates a radical critique of mid-twentieth-century industrial modernity that is simultaneously environmental, mythographic, and rooted in lived displacement. The archival evidence on the novel's genesis in a Barcelona clinic confirms that Graves' vision was enacted through practice: isolated from his library, Graves generated an entire civilisation from internalised mythic memory, embodying the novel's central thesis that cultural and ecological survival relies on living, embodied lore.

This approach offers a necessary repositioning of *Seven Days in New Crete* within the author's broader canon. Long overshadowed by other major historical narratives, the novel has frequently been relegated to the status of an eccentric, minor fantasy. Reassessing the text and its archival coordinates reveals it instead as the imaginative culmination of Graves' philosophical project. Here, the mythographic argument of the Goddess is transformed into a speculative, ecological reality. To do so, Graves actively reclaimed the classical past as malleable, mythographic raw material rather than a rigid historical archive. Furthermore, across his historical fiction, essays, and mythographic texts, Graves consistently grounds memory and poetic authority in the physical realities of place. In *Seven Days in New Crete*, Graves' persistent spatial sensibility is elevated into a fully realised ecocritical model, transforming geographical insularity into an active philosophical argument.

Written at the height of post-war industrial reconstruction by a writer who had already chosen to live outside the logic of the mainland, the novel emerges as an ecotopia *ante litteram*, composed a quarter of a century before Callenbach coined the term, at the precise moment of its greatest cultural invisibility. The most radical act of ecological thinking, Graves demonstrates, is not technological innovation but the recovery of a way of inhabiting the earth that existed before industry replaced the hand of love. As Seymour-Smith observed, "the novel as a whole is a self-fulfilling prophecy" whose "importance as a key to Graves' personality cannot be overestimated" (Seymour-Smith 1995: 411). Read through the combined lens of ecocriticism, island studies, and classical reception, however, it emerges as something more than a key to a personality: it is a key to a civilisational argument, whose urgency, in an age of ecological crisis, has only increased with time.

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