

# The Mythophile and the Mycophile: Robert Graves and R. Gordon Wasson

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Gordon and Natacha Wasson



Graves began corresponding with R. Gordon Wasson (1898-1986) in 1949 and first met him in Mallorca in November 1953. Wasson had earned a Bachelor's degree in Literature, became a Wall Street reporter, joined the banking firm of J. P. Morgan and Company as a press agent, and rose to be its vice-president. Along with his Russian wife Valentina, a pediatrician (she died in 1958), Wasson, "a man of august bearing, insatiable curiosity and insistence on meticulous accuracy" (Brown 19), dedicated all of his spare time to the study of rare hallucinogenic mushrooms in history and religion. The couple published their findings in a number of studies, among them *Mushrooms, Russia and History* (1957), *Les Champignons Hallucinogenes du Mexique* (1958), *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (1969), *Maria Sabina and Her Mazatec Mushroom Velada* (1974), and *The Wondrous Mushroom: Mycolatry in Mesoamerica* (1980). Graves's affinities with the man he once referred to as "the most civilized American I have ever met" (O'Prey 121) would continue to thrive for over a decade.

What could Graves, secluded on Mallorca, possibly have in common with a wealthy New York banker? Certainly not money. On 10 June 1950, Graves wrote to Wasson that he had no investments, kept no accounts, and gave spare money to people he liked. "It is a primitive economy and, some say, reprehensible. ... The Goddess has a sense of humour and to reach down to 23 Wall Street and say: " 'You, there,

recover my lost mushroom lore, and make Morgan & Co. foot the bill is just like her" (O'Prey 75). This "primitive economy" was not only reprehensible but at times perilous. "Robert is dead broke," wrote Ricardo Sicre to Wasson on 23 August 1955, and "will do nothing. He is not even worried" (O'Prey 152-153). This impractical view sometimes forced Graves to rely on people like Wasson to get him out of financial trouble, as in April 1965 when Graves appealed to him for help in leaving Mexico, where he had spent £2,000 in two weeks on Cindy Lee and her friends in Puerto Vallarta (Seymour 429). Wasson helped him out, albeit he had become critical of Graves's relationships. Two years earlier, Graves and two of his Muses (Cindy and Margot) had stayed in Wasson's Manhattan apartment. "Don't worry about me and my loves," Graves wrote afterwards, "they follow an ancient mythical pattern and sustain me as a poet" (31 May 1963, O'Prey 227). Unfortunately, it was up to people like Wasson to sustain Graves financially.

However, it was not as a patron but as a mycologist (or mushroom expert) that Wasson was of interest to the mythographer. Although Wasson the amateur ethnomycologist "was awed by Graves's fame," he was determined not to be overinfluenced by him (Seymour-Smith 464). In fact their relationship, despite some later misunderstandings, was to prove mutually beneficial: Wasson's work had a considerable influence on Graves toward the end of the fifties, and Graves helped to build Wasson's reputation as an authority on the psychological effects of so-called "magic" mushrooms. Moreover, thanks in large part to Graves, Wasson would rediscover the cult of the psilocybe mushroom—known to the Aztecs as *teonan-catl*, "flesh of the gods"—and would become one of the first outsiders ever to participate in the ancient all-night ceremony during which the sacred mushrooms were eaten. In a manner of speaking, Graves and Wasson were first introduced by Claudius, when in January 1949 Graves received a letter from Valentina who, with her husband, was investigating the death of the Roman emperor. Graves had quoted in full the three main classical accounts of the crime—by Suetonius, Tacitus and Dio Cassius—at the end of *Claudius the God*, accounts claiming that Claudius had been served a plate of poisoned mushrooms, managed to save himself, and given a second (and this time fatal) poison by his physician Xenophon. The Wassons suggested to Graves that the mushrooms Claudius ate were the *Amanita caesarea*, a tasty and wholesome mushroom, although the assassin hired by Agrippina slipped into the dish some poisonous *Amanita phalloides*, causing symptoms very similar to the ones Claudius suffered.

This was the impetus for Graves to come up with a new theory about the second poison. At the end of *Claudius the God*, he had

quoted Seneca's satire, *The Apocolocyntosis of Claudius*, 'apocolocyntosis' being a combination of 'apotheosis' (deification) and 'colocynthos' (pumpkin), as in 'Pumpkinification'. Graves now realized that colocynthos also meant 'wild gourd', a powerful alkaline poison. On 26 January, he wrote to Valentina: "The accounts of his death all state that the poison was introduced into the mushrooms, not that the mushrooms were themselves poisonous." Graves concluded by saying that had he known as much in 1934, he would not have accepted the misleading translation, 'Pumpkinification' (O'Prey 53).

When Gordon Wasson replied that he and his wife were impressed by Graves's theory—that Seneca had given the secret away in his title—Graves sent them a long letter on 6 March reconstructing in detail the sufferings of the dying Claudius and recounting how the second poisoning, a clyster, had resulted in a "rectal explosion and an inarticulate vocal noise" satirized by Seneca as "O vae me, me-me, puto, concacacavi," "Oh I think I have m-m-messed mys-s-self!", with concacacavi combining concacare (to defecate) and concavare (to hollow out) in Claudius's stutter (Cf. O'Prey 54-56 and 298 n. 45 and n. 48).

This was the beginning of an epistolary relationship that would result in a number of important publications from both men. Perhaps Graves saw in Wasson a devoted amateur more passionate about his avocation than many professionals. On 1 February 1951, Graves wrote to him and lamented the amazing "crippling lack of liaison between specialists in particular departments of knowledge. For example, no expert on mythology has or wants to have any knowledge of astronomy, botany or sexual pathology. No mycologist (except yourself) troubles to use a Dutch or Breton dictionary or sends for an oil-lamp wick" (O'Prey 86). Graves had sent Wasson an oil-lamp wick to demonstrate the mushroom form of the shadow it throws to suggest a reason for the etymological links in various languages between 'wick' and 'mushroom' (O'Prey 302 n. 101).

In short, Graves had found in this New York bank vice-president a temperament similar to his own. "Of course all books on totally new lines like yours take 6 times as long to write as one expects; but who wants to write books on totally old lines?" (29 Aug 1954, O'Prey 138, Graves's emphasis). "[Y]ou are one of the very few people whose mind works along the same devious channels as mine," Graves wrote the following year, "and correspondence with you makes me feel less eccentric. Especially as you have a most admirable capacity—and organization, it seems—for checking up on 'fantastic' theories by consulting the best authorities on specialized subjects" (22 Oct 1955 in O'Prey 149). Clearly their mutual attraction was based on similar ways of exploring the universe: with an uncompromising curiosity that led to fascinating—albeit sometimes outlandish—hypotheses and

conclusions.

For instance, in early 1952, when the Wassons had turned their attention to the relationship of mushrooms to ancient religion, Graves began to follow up clues and sent them a great deal of information and opinions on several etymological questions: a myth of the Corinthians' origin from mushrooms, a myth about Perseus's discovery of a mushroom on the site of Mycenae, and, in a letter of early April, a drawing of a mushroom in the corner of an Etruscan mirror (reproduced in O'Prey 108) from an illustration in a book entitled *Zeus* by A.B. Cook. Graves commented that the mushroom was there as symbolic tinder for Ixion's seven-spoked firewheel, symbolized by a seven-petaled flower. This information reached the Wassons as they were finishing *Mushrooms, Russia and History* (but published only in 1957) and fitted in with their discussion of the relation between tinder and mushrooms, especially as the mushroom represented on the mirror resembled the agaric mushroom *Polyporus officinalis* (or 'female agaric') used both as a cathartic and as tinder.

Wasson replied to explain that all this was also linked to the words 'punk' and 'spunk' in English, suggesting they derived from the Greek for 'sponge.' Graves replied on 15 April to clarify the difference between female and male agaric by explaining the meanings of 'spunk' as either a female receptacle for the male fire-stick or as the male procreative force itself (O'Prey 109). Wasson had told Graves that he was "a little frightened" by Graves's "capacity for detecting inner meanings" (in O'Prey 108), to which the island-bound Graves replied: "What astonishes me is how you manage to think so clearly about these problems in the Banking district of New York" (O'Prey 110).

The relationship intensified considerably in September 1952 when Graves sent Wasson a cutting from a pharmaceutical paper which mentioned the 1938 discovery, by Dr. Richard Evans Schultes, of the survival of the use of intoxicating mushrooms among certain Indians in Mexico. Wasson telephoned Schultes at Harvard immediately and was encouraged to focus his attentions on Mexico. It was therefore Graves's cutting that was in large part responsible for sending the Wassons to the remote hill villages of southern Mexico to participate in the night-long rites of the cult of the sacred mushroom. Beginning in 1953, the Wassons would visit the Mazatec Indians of Mexico every summer to study, photograph, and record their rituals.

It was when Wasson returned from his first trip, where he had taken part in what Graves described as "a divinatory mushroom session in a backward Indian tribe" (O'Prey 121), that the two men met for the first time: Wasson visited Graves on Palma in November and related his extraordinary experiences. "For Graves, who had been forced to rely

on his imagination to describe the ritual orgies of the Goddess, this had a particular fascination. ... Graves's envy of Wasson's firsthand experience of the mushroom drug was unconcealed" (Seymour 349). It was only a matter of time before the poet and the banker experienced together the altered state of consciousness brought about by the sacred mushrooms.

In August 1955, when Wasson sent Graves a detailed account of his experience of eating mushrooms, this triggered in Graves's mind thoughts about the place of mushrooms in ancient religion. First he linked 'mushrooms' with 'mystery' in Greek, both having a common stem; then, on the problem of why some peoples are 'mycophagous' (mushroom-eating), he suggested to Wasson (on 21 Aug): "A new idea: do you not think it possible that mycophobia is perhaps due to a tabu on mushrooms because of their oracular sacredness, translated popularly into a fear of their poison? I am suddenly convinced of this" (O'Prey 146).

According to O'Prey, what fascinated Graves most was that Nero had called mushrooms 'the food of the Gods': was he coining a phrase, or was he jokingly applying what was perhaps a Greek proverb about mushrooms to the murder of Claudius, whom Nero had deified after this death? Graves now began to wonder if the hallucinogenic mushroom had been used in ancient divine ritual and, writes O'Prey, if even the Buddha had deliberately taken "toxic mushrooms to ensure his immortality or to 'see' the gods" (O'Prey 146). However, after reading the typescript of *Mushrooms, Russia and History*, on 22 October Graves returned it to Wasson with a long letter in which he stated that 'the food of the gods' could mean neither the food of those "philosophical abstractions called gods by the 'Olympian, Egyptian and Babylonian priests. Nor could it mean the food that gave one a view of the gods. In pre-Olympian days it was the sacred kings and queens who were the gods. ... Mushroom eating would thus be a royal *tabu*; connected particularly with smith-gods?" He ends with the idea that since Pythagoras and his successor Empedocles were both regarded as gods, the secret of their "peculiar knowledge of divine matters was the mushroom" (O'Prey 149, Graves's emphasis). Then on 22 December, Graves—"I am in bed with a cold and this problem is haunting me"—wrote Wasson to outline a new idea that was in effect the germ of one of his finest essays, "Centaur's Food" (1960). In it he quotes Greek, Sanskrit, and Gaelic sources to explain that 'ambrosia' was withheld from mortals because it conveyed immortality (cf. O'Prey 158-159).

Apart from his fascination for mushrooms as objects of ancient worship, what was also of great interest to Graves was the relationship of the mushroom trance to the poetic trance. His letter of 22 October

1955 contains a fascinating explanation of how he—along with Keats, Coleridge, Shakespeare, and Spenser—possessed “that capacity for seeing things in the weird romantic light usually known as ‘glamour’.” This was the state, he wrote, that Wasson had experienced under the influence of mushrooms. “I have also had it,” Graves continued, “fitfully, and poems written in that sort of trance are capable of affecting readers susceptible to glamour into a re-creation of what the poet saw. ... The main difference between the poetic trance and the sort you experienced (in each there is a strong realization of one’s actual situation, and the critical intelligence is not dormant) is that the poetic trance comes on because an important statement is waiting to be made; the images are induced by the need for the statement. And the freedom of the mind to remember half-forgotten things (which seems also characteristic of the mushroom trance) is enlarged by the faculty of choice between the things remembered. In a poem written under the glamour-trance the mind is working ... on several levels at once” (O’Prey 146-147). Graves went on to explain to Wasson how, in *The White Goddess*, he relates the poetic trance to the ecstatic worship of the Moon Goddess and to Muse worship. He also speculated that some of Wasson’s ritual experiences—such as the use of thirteen pairs of mushrooms—were “but a memory of the Triple Goddess.” He even suggested that the ritual’s “female” numerology indicated a woman’s cult, and that “the men broke in — as at Delphi, Tempe and Dodona — to break the monopoly” (O’Prey 148, Graves’s emphasis). It is clear that Graves was now beginning to see increasingly important parallels between his own poetic universe and Wasson’s ethnomycological explorations. He drew even closer to understanding the nature of the mushroom-trance when he paid the Wassons a visit while in New York in 1957 on one of his American lecture tours. One evening in their luxurious Manhattan apartment, the sacred mushrooms were put on show and a tape-recording played of the curandera chanting during a ceremony at Oaxaca. Slowly the mysteries of mushroom-worship were being unveiled.

On 13 April, Wasson sent Graves the two-volume *Mushrooms, Russia and History*, in which he and his wife gave him full credit for his part in their discoveries of the exact circumstances of Claudius’s death, of the sacred mushroom cult in Mexico, of the role of narcotic mushrooms in ancient history and the thesis that mycophobia is a vestige of an ancient religious taboo. The Wassons emphasized in the book the widespread ancient belief that lightning engenders mushrooms and the fact that in Oaxaca the mushroom god is also the lightning god, Tlaloc. Graves replied with “1000,000 thanks for the book and for doing me the honour of so many credits in the index.” He was also inspired to outline a new theory: since Dionysus was born of light-

ning, eaten ceremonially, and his intoxication made his devotees go berserk (undated Apr 1957 in O'Prey 164), could Dionysus also have been a mushroom god? He wrote on 9 May that "fly-amanite is the key that fits a number of locks. The point is: that there is a missing element in the whole concept of Greek religion has always been apparent—a practical explanation in terms of a drug or some other direct way of inspiration" (O'Prey 165). Perhaps fly-amanite was the agent that sent Dionysus's Maenads raging, "and his festival, which took place during the mushroom season and which was called 'the Ambrosia', perhaps originally was a mushroom orgy" (O'Prey 163-164). Later (7 Feb 1960) he even wrote to Wasson that Semele, Dionysus's mother, must have been the original mystagogue of the cult (O'Prey 191)!

It did not take long after this for Graves's interest in mushroom-worship to reach its climax, and the mystagogue was none other than Gordon Wasson. It was on 31 January 1960, while on another American lecture tour, that Graves had a Dionysian experience of his own: he and a few others (including choreographer Jerome Robbins) assembled at Wasson's apartment to sample, in pill form, the Mexican mushrooms containing the hallucinogenic psilocybin. They also listened in complete darkness to the religious invocations of the Zapotec curandera to Tlaloc, Mexican god of mysteries and lightning, that Wasson had recorded. (The text of the ceremony performed on 12 and 13 July, 1958 by the curandera Maria Sabina in the village of Huautla de Jimenez was published in 1974).

This experience had a profound effect on Graves, and he described his visions in his essay, "The Universal Paradise" (published in *Difficult Questions, Easy Answers* (1973), visions that included a "descent to the blue-green grottoes of the sea, and a passage through blazing treasuries of jewels," even "a group of naked Caryatids." "In this mountain-top Eden," he wrote, the musical notes of the curandera's song could be watched, as they slowly fell and turned into leaves, flowers, or twisted golden chains.... A sense of utter peace and profound wisdom held me, until the influence began to fade and I rose up refreshed" (Graves 93 and 89, Graves's emphasis). Under the influence of mushrooms, Graves entered "a state of unusual euphoria" that resulted in "an illumination of the mind, a re-education of sight and hearing, and even of touch" (Graves 92).

He wrote to Wasson on 7 February, "I am now able to see pictures in my mind far more clearly than I did before: the mushrooms seem to have broken down some sort of barrier between thought and vision—not completely yet, but noticeably (O'Prey 189). In his enthusiasm, Graves even proposed the establishment of a universal tripartite mushroom ceremony: "I have no doubt at all but that the mushroom

should be restored among Europeans and people of European descent to its original (presumed) position in religion: first of all as an initiation ceremony to religion at puberty; then as a heightening of the marriage rite; finally as a viaticum—so that when the door of heaven opens one really enters and sees those one has loved" (O'Prey 190). These drug-induced inspirations, despite their implausibility, are nonetheless evidence that Graves strongly endorsed the hallucinogenic experience. He described Wasson in his mushroom-trance as being "in a state of grace, ... your face glowed like Moses on his descent from Sinai" (O'Prey 190).

Unfortunately, Graves's second experience turned out to be very disappointing. His first had been with pills prepared from the mushrooms themselves, but on 6 May—while in America for the reception of his manuscripts by the University of Buffalo—Graves, Beryl and Wasson took psilocybin pills prepared synthetically, using a technique developed by Dr. Albert Hofmann, the first to identify lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD-25) in 1943. This time there was no euphoria, the psychic effects were confused and difficult to remember, and there were unpleasant after-effects (O'Prey 196-197). According to Seymour, the following day both Beryl and Graves were "quiet and pale; the synthetic substitute used on this occasion had produced no celestial visions and left them feeling queasy for several days" (Seymour 393). Graves wrote to Karl Gay on 8 May that synthetic psilocybin was "a common vulgar *drug*, no magic, and followed by a nasty hang-over" (O'Prey 197, Graves's emphasis).

Despite this rather negative experience, the following year (1961) Graves recounted his initial visions and insights to an Oxford student audience. Although Aldous Huxley had already described the effects of taking mescaline and LSD in *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), for many young Oxfordians, writes Seymour, "this was their first authoritative account of 'tripping'." Yet it is clear that Graves disapproved strongly of drug-taking outside a controlled environment. His own experiments in Wasson's home were made out of scientific curiosity; in Deya, where drug-takers were soon to proliferate, "he turned a blind eye to a practice he refused to indulge" (Seymour 391). Writing to a friend on 28 September 1968, he stated that marijuana was "only for the down and outs, poor creatures, and for the wretched GI's in Vietnam. The worst trouble is that it makes one vulnerable to suggestion; I like to keep my own mind clear" (in Seymour-Smith 502).

Despite his continuing ethnological interest in hallucinogenic mushrooms, Graves had become less enthralled by their personal use and would even write to Wasson on 30 May 1962 that he no longer wanted to take any. His interest in them was now "mainly historical. Having

once had that experience of a full use of the imaginative senses, I don't really want it again. It certainly has heightened my poetic powers by making me aware of sound and colour and texture as never before since my late childhood. ... The spell includes everything that is usually known as 'being in love' — 'the lunatic, the lover, the poet', the child and the mushroom adept of the Mysteries are 'of imagination all compact'. How to preserve it is the problem of most importance" (O'Prey 213-214). And on 10 June he reiterated that "the importance of the hallucinogenetic [sic] mushroom is in informing people of the full visual and sensory powers of their imagination, so that they can afterwards use it to better purpose. With me, the experience certainly broke down a barrier which had been raised in my mind since I was about twelve and had had a vision of the same 'knowledge of good and evil' which the mushroom gives one. There has been a new dimension ... to my poems since that date. I feel that psilocybe should be given once, with full precautions, at an initiatory rite instead of that dreary episcopal 'confirmation' of the Anglican Church" (O'Prey 216).

In his 30 May letter, Graves had also mentioned to Wasson that Idries Shah—under whose spell Graves had fallen in January 1961—had some exciting information for him about the mushroom-eaters. Shah, who was to become Graves's confidant in his experiences with the Muse and the Goddess, was engaged in the study of ecstatic religions. In June, Wasson wrote to Graves about his latest theory: that soma, the intoxicating plant-deity worshipped by the Hindus in 2000 BC, was in fact a species of hallucinogenic mushroom, *Stropharia cubensis Earle*, found only in hot countries and only in cow pats, and that the cow is sacred in India because its excrement carried the sacred mushroom. "I beg you to keep this idea between us," he urged Graves; "do not even tell Idries Shah" (in O'Prey 216). Whereas Graves reported that Wasson was "'in seventh heaven over Idries's mushroom secrets'" (in O'Prey 215), according to Seymour, Wasson in fact was skeptical of Shah's claims to know all about Eastern secret mushroom rituals (Seymour 400).

When Wasson asked Graves to accompany him and Albert Hofmann to Mexico, Graves replied on 10 June 1962 that he could not, but that the soma theory sounded "very possible," and wondered, "when Demeter sends Triptolemus in his serpent Chariot to give mankind the secret of bread, is it really the secret of sacrificial bread containing mushrooms that he's taking?" (O'Prey 217). On 16 June, he wrote with excitement that Shah had told him that "Soma is still made from *Stropharia*, in cowpats ritually offered to the Gods, and the urine of the priest who has eaten it and gone into ecstasy [sic] is drunk by the lesser devotees as 'cow's urine' (O'Prey 217, Graves's emphasis). O'Prey relates that when the soma-god Indra was asked by some fol-

lowers for soma, he offered them his urine (O'Prey 312 n. 58). In light of Wasson's request for discretion, Graves added that Shah was "not at all interested in publishing the material himself" and that he had exclaimed, after Graves had showed him Wasson's letter, "'How brilliant of Wasson to come to this conclusion by intuition!'" (O'Prey 217-218). Although the astonished Wasson replied and even elaborated on the theory again, he warned Graves a second time to remain discreet.

Graves would regard Wasson himself as having being somewhat too discreet in 1969, when Wasson published *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality*, reviewed by Graves in *Atlantic Monthly* under the title, "The Two Births of Dionysus" (published in *Difficult Questions, Easy Answers*). After further study, Wasson had concluded that soma could not have been the Stropharia mushroom, as he had originally postulated, but was instead the hallucinogenic *Amanita muscaria* or fly-agaric. What distressed Graves was that Wasson made no mention of Graves's contributions to the book despite the fact that he had provided Wasson with information for it early in his research, even reassuring Wasson in person that his arguments about *Amanita muscaria* were sound; "unfortunately I kept no notes of our conversation and he [Wasson] does not mention this incident in his book" (Graves 108). Moreover, a dozen years previously, in "Centaur's Food" (*Atlantic Monthly*, Aug 1956; reprinted in *Food for Centaurs*, 1960), Graves had outlined a number of important ideas that now found their way into Wasson's new book, but without any credit to Graves. And since Graves had sent Wasson a copy of *Food for Centaurs* upon its publication (6 May 1960), and Wasson had written him in July to acknowledge the gift and say he had enjoyed it (Seymour-Smith 502), he was thus certainly familiar with Graves's prior work.

Perhaps, as Seymour suggests, Wasson's reluctance to mention his debt to Graves is understandable in light of Graves's dubious reputation among academics and scholars as something of an unreliable eccentric. As Graves admitted in his review, "any mention of my work in academic books is so suspect as to detract from their sales value and general acceptance" (Graves 109). When Wasson read the review, he wrote to Graves on 21 November that he had forgotten the conversation but that Graves's account had brought it back to him. "Please forgive me if I failed to give you credit for the continuing debt that I owe you" (in O'Prey 284), he wrote. He also said that he did not mention "Centaur's Food" because he was reserving it for the future, when he would point out that ambrosia is cognate with the Vedic word for 'soma'. Graves must have been sufficiently placated, for he replied, "Complete peace between me and you on the soma plane!" (in O'Prey 285), writing that since his name "had slipped out of the preface in error, so I hope it slips back again when you publish your

enlarged popular edition of that splendid book" (undated, in O'Prey 285).

Nonetheless, Graves continued to be puzzled by Wasson's refusal to recognize his influence. When Wasson published a 1972 paper on the murder of Claudius, "Graves was only glancingly acknowledged to have made a contribution to his thesis," even though he had provided Wasson with the background by which Seneca's satire could be seen to hold true, as well as confirmed the most likely form of mushroom used to poison Claudius—information that in Wasson's paper appears to have been discovered by Wasson himself (Seymour 495 n. 8). And when two Swiss writers sent Graves a copy of their article refuting Wasson's account of the death of Claudius, Graves replied diplomatically in June 1973: "Wasson has been curiously abstemious in his mentions of me, considering that I first sent him the mushroom source in Mexico; introduced him to his sole European predecessors there; & sent him to another mushroom source in New Guinea" (in Seymour-Smith 503). At one point, Graves had claimed that he had assisted Wasson in solving "three outstanding mycological problems: the sacral use of the shelf mushroom in ancient Corinth; the exact circumstances of Claudius's death; and, the most exciting of all, the sacred narcotic mushroom cult of the Aztecs" (O'Prey 121).

In any event, Graves seems to have been careful not to alienate or discredit Wasson. For a time, they had shared similar enthusiasms and then moved on to other projects, eventually ceasing to correspond altogether. Despite their later differences and misunderstandings, however, the mythographer and the mycologist had managed to fuel one another's imaginations and to produce "books on totally new lines." What is remarkable is that these two men of limited 'academic' education came together in an attempt to uncover the nature of that elusive element that had brought the ancients closer to divine rapture. Whether one calls it 'ambrosia' or 'soma' or 'magic mushrooms'—or whether it ever existed at all—is perhaps less important than the quest to discover its socio-cultural manifestations and impact, a quest upon which Robert Graves and Gordon Wasson, in a spirit of insatiable curiosity, had joined forces.

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