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The Olive as an Emblem of Love and Rootedness in the Work of Robert Graves

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Abstract

This dissertation analyses the use of the olive in the oeuvre of Robert Graves (1883-1958) as an emblem of love and rootedness. As a consequence of the dramatic advance of industrialisation, many Victorian and Edwardian intellectuals visited the Mediterranean to encounter the last vestiges of antiquity. Those travellers expressed their fondness of the olive tree in their writings and considered it an epitome of the nature and culture of the area. Decades later, Robert Graves moved to Majorca and presented his own point of view of the Mediterranean and the olive. The aim of this paper is to scrutinise the role of the olive as a symbol of fruitful and eternal love, as well as rootedness of the ancient world and Majorcan identity in the work of Robert Graves. In order to achieve this, Graves's poetry and short narrative has been analysed, and data has been gathered from a variety of books and articles by several scholars and British travellers from different centuries. Finally, I suggest that while travel writers opt for other symbols during Graves's time, he recovers the use of the olive as a token in order to preserve the classic way of producing literature.

Keywords: olive, symbol, Robert Graves, travellers, love, rootedness.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Literature Review	4
3. The Olive as an Emblem of Love	7
3.1. Love and Fruitfulness	7
3.2. Love and Eternity	9
4. The Olive as a Token of Rootedness	11
4.1. Rootedness of the Ancient World	12
4.2. Rootedness of Majorcan Identity	14
5. Conclusion	16
6. Works cited	18

1. Introduction

Prompted by their rejection towards the dehumanising industrialisation of the North, some Victorian and Edwardian intellectuals decided to travel the Mediterranean in search of the last remnants of an untouched paradise. Those authors provided their own perception of the Mediterranean in their works and many appointed the olive an emblem of it (Flitch 1911, 111). Regarding this, Buswell explains that the definition of ‘Mediterranean’ is variable, and assuming that it only comprises the coastal areas the sea touches would neglect any inland territories. Then, what veritably delimitates the Mediterranean is the presence of the olive (2011, 6) and for that reason, in no account about the area can this tree go unnoticed. As a consequence, this element is certainly present in the travel narratives of Victorians and Edwardians, where it embodies their preconceived idea of the Mediterranean as an idyllic timeless territory that is about to disappear.

As decades went by, new elements such as the orange started to gain importance when defining the Mediterranean (Moyà 2016, 163), which provoked the relegation of the use of the olive tree as a token in travel literature. However, a modern figure who continued taking this item into consideration was Robert Graves (1883-1958). Thus, by dint of its richness in Classical mythology and its connections with the abiding Majorcan countryside that had not been corrupted yet (and where he had moved in 1929), the olive was abundantly utilised in his work. The aim of this dissertation is to expose the importance of the olive as an emblem of love and rootedness in Robert Graves’s poetry and short narrative. In order to achieve this, this thesis contains two parts. The first consists of a literature review that highlights the relevance of the olive tree in travel writing during the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. This section concludes with an approach to Robert Graves’s use of symbols, especially those related to nature. Secondly, this dissertation displays an analysis of the role of the olive as a token in Robert Graves’s poems and short stories, comprised within the books *The Complete Poems* (2003), *Collected Poems* (1975) and *Complete Short Stories* (1995). This part has been divided into two different chapters: “3. The Olive as an Emblem of Love” and “4. The Olive as a Token of Rootedness”. The first consists of an exploration of the importance of the olive as an embodiment of love, and more specifically eternal and fruitful love. After that, the focus is placed on the figure of the tree as

a symbol of rootedness, paying special attention to its representation of ingraining of the ancient world and Majorcan identity.

2. Literature review

Victorian and Edwardian travellers considered the olive tree the ultimate emblem of the abiding Mediterranean due to its strength and durability, which led them to identify it as an immortal vestige of the ancient civilisations of the area. As a consequence, the olive is continuously utilised to connote antiquity and to add local colour to their writings about the territory, especially Majorca and Ibiza. For this reason, this review aims to analyse the relevance of the olive as an emblem of ancientness and its use to denote Mediterranean local colour in Victorian and Edwardian travel literature. In addition, symbolism of natural elements in Robert Graves's work will be approached. Nevertheless, even though some scholars have examined the poet's use of tokens, the presence of the olive in his work has not been exhaustively scrutinized. In consequence, an analysis about this element in Graves's poetry and short narrative will be developed throughout the rest of the thesis.

Firstly, as a result of the steep industrialisation that had overtaken Great Britain during the late Victorian and Edwardian era, a considerable amount of intellectuals travelled the Mediterranean in pursuit of the last remains of the classical world. According to Moyà, during that period "The olive tree becomes a representation of the connection between ancient times (and wise, shrewd agriculture) and the effects of the sun" (2013, 163). To Fitch, the olive tree represents durability, vitality and wealth, and because of this, he considers it an emblem of eternal Mediterranean (1911, 111). Moreover, the Victorian novelist Charles Kingsley points out that olive trees look so ancient no one would doubt that those bearing fruits in his day in Nîmes are exactly the same whose oil was produced for Roman ladies during the period of the Caesars (1874, 206). Ruskin also focuses on the Classical weight of the tree in *The Crown of Olive* and he narrates the mythological origins of this prize that has symbolised peace, fruitfulness and freedom since antiquity (1866, xxxiii).

Additionally, in *The Mediterranean Passion*, Pemble explains how Disraeli praises the cultural impact the Mediterranean has had for all Europeans, not only in terms of landscape, art, and literature, but also in a religious sense (1987, 8). Thus, many writers have associated the olive tree to the days of the testaments. As to this, Ruskin states that "in the

Holy Land the remembrances connected with it [the olive] are of course more touching than can ever belong to any other tree of the field” (2009, 175). Moreover, both Spurgeon and Symonds personify the olive as a storyteller that provides first-person information about Scriptural times and who establishes a link between that ancient period and the authors’ (Pemble 1987, 123).

Secondly, in their quest for genuine Mediterranean civilisation, Victorians and Edwardians found in places like Majorca and Ibiza the last remnants of an idealised antiquity. Those travellers’ representations of the islands are full of exotic descriptions of the landscape that provide local colour, which is underscored by the presence of the olive. Those depictions add, in turn, an orientalist perspective of the isles. For instance, D’Este boosts the sense of remoteness by comparing the olive tree to fantastic creatures: “a gigantic toad”, “a boa constrictor [that] twines itself and folds about its prey” and “an antediluvian monster” (1907, 36). As a result, these illusive analogies of the tree propel an image of the Balearics as an idyllic spot where one can return to the magic and innocence of childhood (Moyà 2016, 129).

Consequently, Majorcans are often described as rural and rather infantilised individuals who live peacefully in a bucolic setting of calm and innocence: “Innumerable sheep-bells tinkled among the olive yards, and the voice of a herdsman rang out in a Gregorian chant from far up the heights where he tended his goats among holm oak and pine” (D’Este 1907, 38). Besides, those British writers depict charming locals who are especially welcoming towards visitors and whose hospitality is often presented by means of the olive. With regard to that, D’Este mentions that travellers are always offered a plate with olives at the *hospedèria* (85), and Boyd shows extremely kind and cheerful olive pickers who greet British tourists (1911, 99). Then, comers cherish the innocence, rurality and kindness that appear to have vanished in the North, but that are still rooted in Majorcan identity. This therefore implies that such aspects had remained fixed in locals’ demeanor notwithstanding the passage of time or any other circumstance.

Nevertheless, those visitors also point out that the idealised primitivity ingrained in natives’ behaviour, as well as the rurality of the Balearic landscape is about to disappear. In *The Fortunate Isles*, Boyd describes a gothic setting with an exhausted-looking olive (1911, 59) and it stands for antique Majorcan tradition. The tree, in spite of being capable of growing on inhospitable rocky soils and being thought to be eternal, is starting to die, and so is genuine islander culture on account of the arrival of mass tourism.

Finally, when the tourist industry gained a significant importance on the island, the figure of the olive started to lose relevance in travel writing. Thus, a shift of symbols took place, and the olive, which used to represent antiquity and the vestiges of past civilisation, got overshadowed by the sweet and juicy orange that became the token of the sun and sensuality of today's Mediterranean (Moyà 2016, 163).

As for symbols, Robert Graves's oeuvre is extremely rich, as he extracted them from a wide variety of inspiration sources. Among the vast amount of emblems he works with it is crucial that his focus on natural elements be taken into account.

With respect to this, Graves pays special attention to various elements from nature such as heavenly bodies like the moon and the sun (De Montaner 2015, 57), precious metals, gems, as well as Zodiac signs (Simonne 2007, 35-36). In addition to that, the way in which he uses flora is highly meaningful and it must not be taken for granted when analysing his work. As Simonne states: "He would seldom refer to a plant or animal purely for decorative reasons, but would select a particular item for its historical, geological, mythological, allegorical, psychological or medicinal properties or for its emotional associations" (2012, 169). Furthermore, she expresses that not only is he very keen on using an extensive range of Northern plants, but also Mediterranean flora. Unlike other contemporary British travellers who visited the Balearics, Graves gives a major role to the olive in his work than to the orange tree, due to the mythological and classical references of the former (164). Therefore, Graves recaptures the Victorian and Edwardian perception of the olive as a symbol of ancientness, but, in addition to that, he represents it as a token of love. As a result, Robert Graves resurrects this element during a period in which it is overshadowed by the orange. Because of this, his use of the olive as an emblem of love and rootedness will be scrutinized throughout the rest of the thesis. With respect to this, the meaning nuances the poet delivers through the olive are incredibly varied. Simonne comments that the trunk represents an eternal embrace (175). As to that, olive trunks split and get entangled with time, simulating the arms of two people who hold each other tight. Moreover, olive boughs stand for peace (169), and, besides that, the green colour of its foliage represents magic, while its silver tint is connected to the moon (175).

In short, the connotations of ancientness and exoticism that were attributed to the olive during the late Victorian and Edwardian period resulted in the production of a biased construct about the Mediterranean. Later on, Robert Graves rescued this symbol. Since his

use of such token has not been deeply commented, this dissertation will examine how the poet utilises the olive (presented in different forms) to embody fruitful and eternal love, as well as rootedness of the ancient world and Majorcan identity.

3. The Olive as an Emblem of Love

In *The Crown of Olive*, Ruskin explains how the olive interferes positively in love, providing people with the richnesses they need: “Free-heartedness, and graciousness, and undisturbed trust, and requited love, the sight of the peace of others, and the ministry of their pain” (1866, xxxiii-xxxiv). Graves, just like Ruskin, perceives a connection between the tree and love and, in consequence, he uses it abundantly in his poetry. In fact, the writer often displays olive groves as a scenario where people can live their love freely and purely. For instance, in “The Terraced Valley”, he describes a psychedelic vision of an olive terrace within the imagination of the poetic voice. The speaker forces his mind to encounter his partner in the grove, because it is the most propitious setting for love. Thus, due to the well-appreciated fruit it produces, its strength and endurance throughout the centuries, as well as its powerful roots that make it grip to the soil, not only is the olive tree a token of love, but it is namely a symbol of fruitful and eternal love.

3.1. Love and Fruitfulness.

As olive trees provide a fruit that is extremely valued in the Mediterranean, Robert Graves’s poetry contains many examples where olives indicate abundance or scarcity of fruitfulness in a love story based on the environment the trees are in. This means that, depending on whether the situation surrounding the olive is enriching or detrimental to it, the fruitfulness the tree announces will be positively or negatively affected.

For instance, Graves approaches immature love in “*Song: The Olive Tree*”. There, the relationship is not embodied by an adult olive that can bear fruits, but by a green sapling that the couple can see from their window. Therefore, the lovers, whose relationship is epitomized by the young tree, cannot provide fruitful love at the moment, so they spend the night together only to say goodbye in the morning:

Two birds flew from her
In the eye of morning

Their folded feathers

In the sun to shake (1975, 389, 9-12).

Despite this, the poet could be suggesting that their love is bound to be fruitful once lovers are mature enough. For this reason, in order to denote future fertility, the sapling is referred to as a feminine being: “With her leaves twinkling” (389, 7), “Two birds flew from her (389, 9). Additionally, the poem is set in May, which is the time of the year when olives start to bloom. This could imply that the beginning of fruitfulness that comes with the nearby maturity of both the tree and the relationship is about to take place.

In other compositions, Graves hints a scarcity of fruitfulness by including external factors that affect the olive, or simply by not mentioning the fruit. In the case of “The Oleaster”, he presents a fruitless love by comparing the poetic voice’s lover to a wild olive. Regarding this, the narrator states that the shoots of the oleaster, like their love, grow aimlessly only to be lopped later: “Sprout impudent shoots born only to be lopped/ Spring after Spring. Theirs is a loveless berry...” (273, 10-11). After that, the speaker adds that even though the oleaster produces many fruits, these are not sweet like the ones olive trees yield:

Innumerable, plump with promise of oil,

The olives hang grass-green, in thankfulness

For a bitter sap and bitter New Year Snows (274, 17-19).

Therefore, even though the fruits of the oleaster, just like the love the narrator’s partner professes, seem to be abundant and rich, they are actually bitter, and hence unprofitable.

Furthermore, absence of fruitfulness due to external factors affecting the olive tree is also present in the poem “Ibycus in Samos”. The Greek poet had expressed his fear of falling in love in his fragment 286, where he compares desire to a violent flame that destroys his heart (1991, 85, 6-13). Graves reuses the pernicious fire from that Classical poem and applies it to an olive sprig to connote Ibycus’s impossibility to find fruitful love: “Wherever I wander in this day-long fever/ Sprigs of the olive-trees are touched with fire” (1975, 234, 13-14). Consequently, the destruction of the branches where olives should be hanging could suggest that the fruits of the love those women feel for Ibycus are calcined too. Besides that, the burning of the olive sprigs could also imply a lack of fruitfulness in his poetry:

Who here can blame me if I alone am poet,

If none other has dared to accept the fate

Of death and again death in the Muses’s house? (234, 16-18)

In the last line, not only could the Muse make reference to a real woman, but also to poetic inspiration. Hence, accepting the fire or passion from other women would provoke the wrecking of his heart, as well as the destruction of his poetic production.

Moreover, in “The Winged Heart”, fruitless love is represented through olive branches that are violently shaken by the sirocco wind:

How it hissed, how the leaves of the olives shook!

We had suffered drought since earliest April;

Here we were already in October” (236, 7-9).

These lines show two lovers that are reunited in their mature years after their relationship had been unsuccessful during their youth. In the present, the sirocco wind, which embodies heat and passion, shakes the apparently empty olive branches, which would stand for their fruitless love story. After that, the narrator adds:

Some curse has fallen between us, a dead hand,

and inhalation of evil sucking up virtue:

Which left us no recourse, unless we turned

Improvident as at our first encounter (236, 13-16).

Therefore, since their relationship seems to be cursed and unpromising, the only option they have left is to continue enjoying a *carpe diem* love in a carefree way and expecting nothing from it.

As we have seen, the absent or abundant probability of obtaining fruitfulness in love is exposed through the olive in a variety of ways. In the following chapter, we will observe that the tree is significantly used to denote eternity as well.

3.2. Love and Eternity.

Apart from indicating the possibilities of fruitfulness in love, the olive is also considered a true emblem of eternity due to its longevity over the centuries. Because of this, Graves’s poetic oeuvre contains a great quantity of examples where the tree stands for enduring love.

Firstly, in “Tomorrow’s Envy of Today”, Graves presents the olive grove as a magical place where eternal love is possible. In this poem, the lovers meet in the grove, namely in a lair, since these cavities are easily created at the base of olives thanks to the extravagant shape of their trunks and roots. Thus, since lovers profess their feelings there, these are

strong, unbreakable and protected. Moreover, the olive and the couple's present are compared to one another:

Today we are how we are, and how we see:
Alive, elate, untrimmed, without hazard
Of supersession: flowers that never fade,
Leaves that never shrivel, truth persistent (318, 7-10).

These lines convey how their present is perennial like olive leaves, and because of this, so is their love. In addition, what also represents their present, and hence their love, is that "persistent truth", which the narrator mentions not to be a prophecy. On account of this, their relationship is not determined, but it is "a golden interlock of power" (318, 11-14) that the tree grants the lovers. That, for its part, is associated to the idea of the grove as a numinous place that gives them the ability to continue making that love eternal the following day as well (318, 3).

Furthermore, while the first stanza of "*Song: The Olive Tree*" presents an intermittent love story that ends every morning, the second stanza introduces a vision of the lovers' future that has been blessed by the magical olive tree. As it also occurs in "*The Olive-Yard*", the tree is perceived as a foreseer that prophetizes timelessness: "Augury recorded,/ vision rewarded" (389, 13-14). Like a vision, the olive tree will provide the couple with enduring love: "This bright May morning/ re-echoing" (389, 22-23). Then, like an echo that is repeated every day, their love story will take place eternally thanks to the magical power of the olive.

Additionally, Graves depicts an unreasonable and innocent, yet eternal love in "*Under the Olives*", and he compares it to an olive tree. The poem narrates the meeting of two lovers under an olive tree, and as it also occurs in "*The Terrace Valley*" and "*Tomorrow's Envy of Today*", it becomes the best spot to love. In consequence, even if their feelings strike swiftly and unreasonably, they become timeless when they are professed in the grove:

We never would have loved had love not struck
Swifter than reason, and despite reason:
Under the olives, our hands interlocked (203, 1-3).

When the lovers interlock their hands they are representing an olive trunk, as old olives present twisted and interlocked branches that become one at the base. Therefore, the older an olive is, the more bumps its trunk has. Consequently, when they interlock their hands they

embody an olive, and as a result, their love becomes “innocent, gentle, bold, enduring and proud” (203, 7) like this tree.

Furthermore, despite referring to eternal love through different parts of the olive tree, various external factors determine the future of a love affair in “Arrears of Moonlight”. After introducing a story about unrequited love, the last lines in the poem mention the hooting of an owl that comes from a distant olive and which serves as a metaphor for their relationship: “Though the owl whoops from a far olive branch/ His brief, monotonous, night-long reminder” (327, 6-7). As regards this, the fact that the owl (an outstanding symbol of Athena, the goddess of wisdom who rejects love and passion), and the olive are distant, as well as the owl’s hoots being brief and monotonous, could hint that their love cannot work, as it is unreasonable and a mere product of ephemeral passion.

Then, these poems are examples that prove how Graves was fond of using the olive to epitomise eternal love.

All in all, Graves avails of the olive tree as a token of fruitfulness and eternity in love. In order to achieve this, the poet focuses on specific parts of the tree and conveys a different nuance with each of them. For instance, branches and berries tend to denote fruitfulness, whereas roots, leaves and trunks usually represent durability. Moreover, it is also crucial the elements surrounding the tree and the situation it is in be taken into consideration. Then, the way in which the olive tree (or a specific part of it) is affected by those elements or circumstances (for instance fire, wind, maturity, distance or even an owl) will indicate either abundance or paucity of fruitfulness and whether the relationship features any possibilities of being enduring.

4. The Olive as a Token of Rootedness

By virtue of its robust roots, the olive tree lingers ingrained in the rocky soils of the Balearic countryside for over thousands of years. Because of this, former authors like Boyd and D’Este connected it to the everlasting antiquity that, according to them, survived on the islands. Graves continues this belief of permanent ancientness that previous intellectuals attached to the tree and he portrays it as a token of rootedness. As a result, the olive (presented in different forms) often appears in his *Majorcan Short Stories* to depict entrenched Balearic identity. Additionally, erstwhile intellectuals also underscored the

Classical weight of the tree and appointed it an emblem of such civilisation. Graves follows their steps and highlights the mythological background of the tree in his oeuvre. Thus, in this chapter we will observe how olives represent rootedness of the ancient world and they embody ingrained “Majorcanness” in Graves’s short narrative.

4.1. Rootedness of The Ancient World.

Surviving throughout millennia, the olive tree works as a reminder of the genuine Mediterranean in the accounts of former writers like Kingsley and Ruskin. Those authors considered the olive an immortal witness of remote times, and Graves perpetuates their point of view by utilising this symbol to signify ancient Mediterranean civilisations. Thus, the poet proves in several of his works how the ancient world has ingrained itself up to contemporaneity through the olive.

To begin with, in his poem “Olives of March” Graves recounts the mythological origin of the olive tree, and the relevance it has in the Mediterranean. In *The Greek Myths*, he narrates that in order to put an end to the strife between Athena and Poseidon for the rule of Attica, Zeus decided to give that power to the god who brought the best gift. In the end, Athene won the battle by making the first olive tree appear at the Acropolis in Athens (1955, chap. 16, c). Thus, the tree being a gift from the goddess of wisdom, and due to the wealth it has entailed in the Mediterranean area for millennia, Graves compares its fruit to a precious gem in the poem: “Peering like sapphires from the thick grass” (2003, 831, 2). Furthermore, he adds that “none has ever known them to take root” (831, 3). This way, the divine birth of the tree is proved by how crafty its harvest is, since olives do not take root easily and they require godly intervention to sprout. In the last lines, the poet states that whoever dares to neglect an olive is doomed to undergo detrimental tribulations, one of which is rootlessness (831, 9-11). Therefore, the olive tree provides those who take care of it with a sense of rootedness, because not appreciating it would imply a neglect of the antique Mediterranean it represents. Then, just like that first olive that was grafted and spread throughout the territory in the era of the gods, today’s Mediterranean culture was implanted from the Classical civilisation and, thanks to this, the ancient world has remained ingrained until the present.

Additionally, in *The Myconian*, Graves narrates an encounter between a Greek philosopher and a Roman charioteer who discuss their cultural differences. At some point, the characters debate about the prize one should win at a sporting event, and the Myconian proudly claims that there is no better prize than an olive wreath: “the same award serves all events: an olive-wreath, cut with a golden sickle from the sacred tree” (1995, 280). After that, he emphasises the mythological background of the wreath and he points out the importance of receiving such award, since offering money as a prize would destroy the ethics of the game and it would stop people from playing fairly: “[...] the Olympic Games were founded by Hercules as a contest in manliness, not in money” (282).

Nonetheless, in his poem “Torch and Crown”, which was read at the Mexican Cultural Olympiads in 1968, Graves shows how this ancient tradition has been ingrained into the present. In order to achieve this, the poet explains a different origin of the olive crown that goes back further than the previous version. In this case, he expresses that the primitive Olympic Games were exclusively held for female athletes to honour Hera and only they could wear the olive crown:

The inspired runner who outstropped all rivals
Of her sorority and finished first
Bore off that coveted and holy prize —
The olive crown. [...] (1975, 450, 16-19).

However, although the contest was reserved for women only, the reasons why the olive crown was chosen to be the prize were practically the same. In the previous lines, Graves defines the crown as coveted and holy, and it could not be another way, as so is considered the olive tree. In addition, Graves mentions the case of Atalanta (450, 20-22), who lost a race against her suitor because she got distracted by three golden apples. In account of her mistake, she underwent detrimental consequences that could have been avoided had she not been greedy.

Therefore, the Olympic Games trace their roots back to antiquity and they have undergone some changes. Despite the differences both versions present, they concur with the idea that the olive wreath was the perfect prize for athletes. Regarding this, both of them underscore its holy origins and depict it as a symbol of honest victory that deters greed in the contest. Thus, because the tradition of the wreath has survived since mythical times, the olive represents once again a link between the present and the past. Then, “Torch and Crown”

proves how, despite the changes, this tradition has survived until contemporaneity by virtue of the olive, and hence the ancient world.

Finally, this chapter has shown various examples in Graves's work where the olive betokens the rootedness of the antique Mediterranean culture that remains against all odds. In the following section, we will observe how the writer plays with this element to signify entrenchment of Majorcan identity.

4.2. Rootedness of Majorcan Identity.

Settling in Deià, a small town where olives are the dominant livelihood, Graves uses the tree as a characteristic component of Majorcan views and lifestyle. In fact, Seguí states that his *Majorcan Short Stories* is full of elements that denote local colour, among which the olive tree stands out due to its presence in the landscape and its relevance in Majorcan cuisine (2005, 492). Besides its importance in the Balearic panorama, Robert Graves's short narrative contains plenty of examples where the olive tree betokens rooted "Majorcanness".

To begin with, he explains in *The 5 Godfathers* that olive ploughing is the main source of work on the island. However, many young men were obliged by their parents to take law degrees in order to become "worthy people": "The rest take law degrees because their fathers want to make gentlemen of them that way" (1995, 108). Nonetheless, despite their parents' efforts, the only employment opportunity that is ensured is olive ploughing. This is connected to the idea of Majorca being a "land of innocence", where lawyers were barely needed due to the calm personality of islanders. Such belief, for its part, perpetuates the Edwardian construct of Majorca as an idyllic timeless spot where people lived peacefully in accordance with nature. Therefore, although locals want to progress, there is no way one can make a living out of sophisticated jobs. As a result, those who despise innocent country life in Majorca "waste their time in cafés, or make love to foreign lady-tourists who look lonely" (108). Consequently, the arrival of mass tourism is criticised for destroying the idealised rurality on the island that is epitomised by olive ploughing, and which, in turn, provokes the tranquility that is ingrained in Majorcans' personality.

Also, in *The Lost Chinese*, the young Majorcan orphan Jaume Gelabert makes a living out of an olive grove and Graves shows how treasured olives are on the island, as they have been the main source of wealth and nourishment for its natives during centuries. In fact, after

Jaume achieves sudden fame and he is about to earn a generous amount of money for a play he has written, he still ensures his groves are well taken care of. In addition to this, he offers them as a gift to Graves, who appears as a character in the story, in order to thank him for his help.

Therefore, although olive trees are attached to simple and rural life, they are extremely treasured by Majorcans because they provide olive oil, the most appreciated ingredient in the Balearic gastronomy. *Pa amb oli* is probably the most emblematic dish in the archipelago, and unrefined olive oil is a compelling ingredient in it. Regarding this, Tomás Graves states that what makes a true Majorcan is not one's blood or surnames, but "having suckled from the same breast as the majority of islanders: the *setrill*, the olive oil cruet" (2002, 18). Accordingly, when Jaume is contacted by an agent, Truscott, he welcomes him with a *pa amb oli* that is presented as test. Then, only those who really belong on the island and feel it rooted in them will meet the challenge: "*pa amb oli* was something of a test for Truscott, but he passed it all right, apart from letting oil drip on his muddied trousers" (Graves 1995, 255). Truscott seemed to enjoy the flavour of the meal, as he also seemed to relish rural life enthusiastically: "He asked me to compliment Jaume on 'this snug little sack. Say that I envy him. Say that we city folk often forget what real dyed-in-wool *natural* life can be!" (255). Nevertheless, he stains his trousers with the olive oil and, on top of that, he trips over an olive root twice and falls down. Because of this, it is quite likely that Truscott was faking his enjoyment in order to take advantage of the protagonist, who had to sign a contract to have his play performed in the United States. Then, all those accidents Truscott had with olives would imply that true deep Majorca, just like its emblematic dish and nature, may be way too simple and rooted for some.

Moreover, in *School Life in Majorca 1955*, Robert Graves also shows how *pa amb oli* is a key element to tell who is a true Majorcan. In this short story, it is shown how islander culture is being swallowed up by Spanish tradition, which considers "Majorcanness" unworthy. The narrator, who attends a state school in Palma, expresses: "The playground language is Spanish, because the rich businessmen don't like their children to be mistaken for ordinary Majorcans, even though they are" (69). Nonetheless, those children despise the traditional Madrilenian chickpea soup and they enjoy the simplicity of bread with olive oil (69) because it embodies Majorcanness and it is ingrained in them. In fact, Tomás Graves states about this dish that "On the one hand, it reflects a simplicity, frugality, honesty and

respect for tradition, while on the other the capacity to open up and adapt to outside influences without losing one's identity" (2002, 17-18). Therefore, despite those parents' self-denial, *pa amb oli* proves their children cannot hide their Majorcan roots.

In this section we have seen how Graves used the olive in different ways to express the ingraining of Majorcan identity.

In short, Robert Graves places considerable emphasis on the mythological origin of the olive in order to express the rootedness of the ancient world. Accordingly, he describes the tree as a divine gift that protects the Mediterranean and that serves as the embodiment of its culture. Therefore, as all olives are believed to have been grafted from the sacred tree of Athena, present-day Mediterranean contains the Classical tradition rooted in it. Additionally, by means of the Olympic olive wreath, Graves proves the entrenchment of the ancient world notwithstanding the passage of time and the changes traditions undergo. Moreover, Graves displays a perception of Majorca as a timeless place where locals are depicted as rural and simple. Such characteristics are in some way propelled by the figure of the olive, which is contemplated as a paramount source of wealth and nourishment on the island. Besides, through this element, he preserves the construct former travellers created about Majorcans in their writings, where they defined them as welcoming, kind and simple. Then, in Graves's *Majorcan Short Stories*, it goes without saying that the olive, which appears in different forms, has an outstanding role in local identity, as it stands for the foundations of Balearic livelihood and gastronomy.

5. Conclusion

All in all, the most common use of the olive in travel writing during the late Victorian and Edwardian era aimed to show the last remainders of old times. Consequently, many intellectuals like Kingsley or Ruskin establish a connection between the ancient Mediterranean civilisations and their persistence in contemporaneity through the tree. Also, other writers like D'Este and Boyd included the olive in their accounts to provide an orientalist description of the Balearics as a timeless *Arcadia* on the verge of disappearance. Accordingly, Robert Graves's texts show an enormous influence of former travel literature, since he continues displaying their perception of the tree as an eternal reminder of Classical times that are still currently rooted. Thus, the writer pays substantial attention to the godly

origins of the olive and on how ancient times have survived until today through it. This does not only include the tree as such, but also its importance in primeval traditions, like the awarding of an olive crown to athletes. Besides, in his *Majorcan Short Stories*, the tree is continuously present, with which Graves perpetuates that oriental discourse created by former travellers. With reference to this, the olive appears in his short narrative in a wide variety of forms in order to depict rooted Majorcan character in a positive, although rather paternalistic way. For instance, the ubiquitous olive groves, which are the main livelihood on the island, suggest its rurality, its humble countryside life and its positively appreciated lack of progress. Moreover, Graves also mentions olive roots, as well as *pa amb oli* to suggest entrenchment and simplicity of Majorcan character.

Apart from this, Graves goes beyond the influence of former writers and he also uses the olive to embody love. Therefore, in various of his poems, the olive portrays a sort of magical creature that foresees lovers' future and protects their relationship. Therefore, olive groves become an idealised setting where true love is always achieved. However, the poet does not comply with simply mentioning the tree to express fruitful and eternal love. Indeed, he enriches his poetry tremendously by adding a broad range of nuances to the love story through the choice a specific part of the tree or an external element that will cause an effect on it. For this reason, while the presence of an olive portends successful love, the fact that a specific part of it is somehow impinged on by fire, the sirocco wind, distance, an owl, or any other contingency will considerably twist that initial meaning of the olive. Finally, and as in the case of rootedness, when it comes to the topic of love the olive can also entail a link between past and present. Regarding this, during period in which massive tourism was consolidating, new symbols emerged in travel literature to signify the island, such as the orange, the sea, the sun and sex (Mulvey 1996, 109). Nevertheless, while those figures were becoming more relevant due to their association with passion and fun in "The Sunny South", Graves continued using old tokens. Thus, while travel accounts in the 20s and 30s undergo a literary modernisation, Graves rewinds to the classic way in which bards crafted poetry. Because of this, Graves rescues the olive as an emblem of fruitful and enduring love that stands for a virtue of the past, in contrast to a current viewpoint of love as something ephemeral and shallow that flourished with tourism.

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