

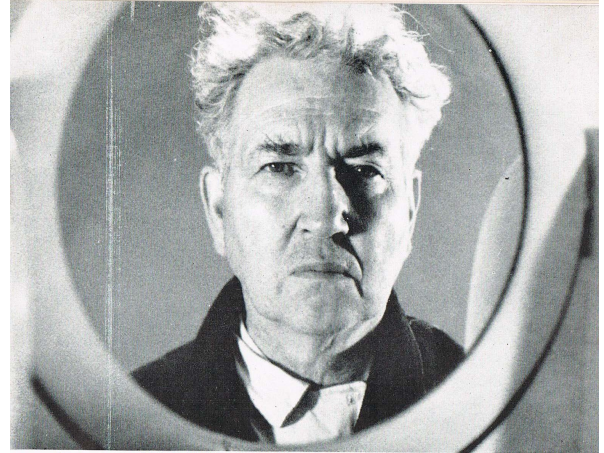


## “The Face in the Mirror” by Robert Graves

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- This poem was first published in *The New Yorker* magazine, in 1957.
- At **La casa de Robert Graves** in Deià, you can watch 1950s film footage of the poet reciting this poem while he shaves, looking at himself in the mirror.



### The Face in the Mirror

#### Stanza 1:

line 1: Grey haunted eyes, absent-mindedly glaring  
line 2: From wide, uneven orbits; one brow drooping  
line 3: Somewhat over the eye  
line 4: Because of a missile fragment still inhering,  
line 5: Skin-deep, as a foolish record of old-world fighting.

#### Stanza 2:

line 1: Crookedly broken nose — low tackling caused it;  
line 2: Cheeks, furrowed; coarse grey hair, flying frenetic;  
line 3: Forehead, wrinkled and high;  
line 4: Jowls, prominent; ears, large; jaw, pugilistic;  
line 5: Teeth, few; lips, full and ruddy; mouth, ascetic.

#### Stanza:3

line 1: I pause with razor poised, scowling derision  
line 2: At the mirrored man whose beard needs my attention,  
line 3: And once more ask him why  
line 4: He still stands ready, with a boy's presumption,  
line 5: To court the queen in her high silk pavilion.



### Suggested Class Work

1. The students read the poem together,
2. Each student reads the story silently, taking notes of any vocabulary questions.
3. The class discuss the vocabulary and comprehension with the teacher and check the various meaning of English words in a dictionary.

#### Questions:

*The teacher can decide which of these elements can be discussed by the class at large.*

1. List the adjectives used to describe the poet's face.
2. Are there any words/phrases that create tension in any of the stanzas?  
— Is the tension resolved?
3. Based on the biographical details you've learned about Graves's life, what events do the following phrases refer to:
  - A) "Because of a **missile fragment** still inhering,  
Skin-deep, as a foolish record of **old-world fighting**."
  - B) "Crookedly broken nose — low **tackling** caused it;"
4. Describe the life events which the poet is reflecting on;  
—what words in this poem convey images of violence, lack of control?
5. Explain what kind of 'presumption' a boy/young person typically has?
6. Who/what do you think is the 'queen' in the lines:

"He still stands ready, with a boy's presumption  
To court the queen in her high silk pavilion."
7. What is the author's opinion of himself?
8. What does this poem say about growing old?
9. Reflect on faces and mirrors as poetic devices, and how they are used in this poem.

#### Assignment:

Study your own face in the mirror; look for distinguishing marks.

—Write your own personal version of "The Face in the Mirror".