

The Caterpillar

by **Robert Graves**



BACKGROUND

Robert Graves (1895–1985) was a British poet and novelist. The son of an Irish poet, Graves started writing poetry as a teenager. At 19, he enlisted as an officer in World War I. He became known as a “war poet” for his realistic poetry about the war. Graves published 55 collections of poetry. “The Caterpillar” is one of his early poems.

SETTING A PURPOSE

Consider why the poet chose to write about a caterpillar. What might Graves have learned by seeing the world through the eyes of this particular creature?

Under this loop of honeysuckle,
A creeping, coloured caterpillar,
I gnaw the fresh green hawthorn spray,
I nibble it leaf by leaf away.

5 Down beneath grow dandelions,
Daisies, old-man’s-looking-glasses;
Rooks flap croaking across the lane.
I eat and swallow and eat again.

Here come raindrops helter-skelter;
10 I munch and nibble unregarding:
Hawthorn leaves are juicy and firm.
I’ll mind my business: I’m a good worm.

3 hawthorn spray: a small branch of a hawthorn tree.

7 rook: large, black bird in the crow family.



When I'm old, tired, melancholy,
I'll build a leaf-green mausoleum
15 Close by, here on this lovely spray,
And die and dream the ages away.

Some say worms win resurrection,
With white wings beating flitter-flutter,
But wings or a sound sleep, why should I care?
20 Either way I'll miss my share.

Under this loop of honeysuckle,
A hungry, hairy caterpillar,
I crawl on my high and swinging seat,
And eat, eat, eat — as one ought to eat.

13 melancholy: sad; pensive.

14 mausoleum: a building that holds tombs for the dead.

17 resurrection: the condition of being restored to life.